Prosperity Farm

Jan Lavrin

All rights reserved ©

Contents

A New Day on the Farm.....1

The Cycle.....9

Whispers in the Barn.....18

Ignition.....36

The Bread Revolt.....46

The New Dawn.....56

A New Day on the Farm

The sun rose steadily over the horizon, casting a golden glow across the sprawling farm. Its light bathed the fields and the barns, making the place look almost peaceful. But the calm appearance was deceptive. The animals, already busy with their daily tasks, moved through the farmyard in tense silence, their movements hurried, their eyes downcast. Above them, in the grandest barn perched on the hill, the pigs watched over everything, their eyes calculating.

On the lower side of the farm, near the mills where the bread was made, a small group of cockroaches scurried about. They worked with precision, kneading dough, pushing it into stone ovens, and pulling it out again, moving almost as if they were part of the machinery itself. The smell of fresh bread filled the air, though it brought no comfort. Every loaf they produced would be taken away to the pigs, leaving only crumbs behind.

In the midst of this, Victor, a slender cockroach with a tired look in his eyes, wiped the sweat from his brow and turned to his friend, Ash. She was smaller than him, but her movements were quick and efficient. The two of them had worked side by side for years, but each day felt heavier than the last.

"Another long day," Victor muttered, glancing up at the barn in the distance. "Do you think they'll give us more bread today? Maybe after all the extra work yesterday, we'll get more than crumbs."

Ash didn't stop working. Her hands moved mechanically as she shaped a lump of dough into a loaf, her eyes hardening at his words. "You know better than that, Victor," she said quietly. "We'll get just enough to keep us going. They don't care how much we work."

Victor sighed, his antennae drooping. "But what if this time it's different? Sludge promised the farm would be fairer. That if we worked harder, we'd all get a bigger share of the bread.*"

Ash paused for a moment, wiping flour from her hands. She looked over at Victor, her voice low but firm. "They've been saying that for years. Hard work doesn't fill our stomachs, it fills theirs."

High up in the barn, the pigs lounged in luxury, their massive, plump bodies resting on soft piles of hay. Inside the grand hall of the barn, Sludge, the largest and oldest of the pigs, stood before the wide windows, peering down at the bustling activity below. Next to him, Guzzle, a smaller but equally smug pig, chewed lazily on a piece of bread, watching the cockroaches move in hurried desperation.

"They're slowing down," Guzzle remarked casually, his voice laced with indifference. "We need them to pick up the pace if we're going to increase production this season."

Sludge grunted in agreement, his eyes narrowing as he watched Victor and Ash speaking near the ovens. "Motivation," he said slowly. "They need motivation. Keep them hungry, and they'll work harder. We'll throw them a few extra crumbs next week and promise more. That should keep them going."

Guzzle snorted. "Works every time."

They turned away from the window, already losing interest in the scene below. The pigs didn't need to concern themselves with the details of the work—the cockroaches would always keep going, driven by the small hope that maybe, just maybe, things would change.

Back at the ovens, Victor and Ash finished another round of bread, their small hands aching from the constant strain. The smell of freshly baked loaves wafted up to their faces, but neither of them dared to take even a nibble. They both knew the bread wasn't for them.

"Maybe this week will be different," Victor whispered again, though his voice had lost its conviction.

Ash glanced at him, her antennae twitching with frustration. "I wouldn't count on it," she said. But deep down, even she found herself hoping—if only for a moment—that Victor might be right.

Inside the grand barn, a dim light filtered through the dusty windows, casting long shadows across the plush haystacks where the pigs gathered. The barn's interior was a stark contrast to the harsh workyard below. Fine straw lined the floor, and the air smelled faintly of the fresh bread that came from the cockroaches' toil.

Sludge stood at the head of the room, his thick frame dominating the space as the other pigs lounged comfortably around him. A sense of smug authority radiated from him, and his small eyes flickered with a cunning gleam as he addressed the group.

"We have a problem," Sludge began, his voice slow and deliberate. "Productivity is slipping. The cockroaches, the other animals... they're not working hard enough."

Guzzle, sitting lazily on a pile of hay, lifted his head and raised an eyebrow. "You mean they're getting tired?" he drawled, taking another bite of bread.

Sludge snorted. "Tired, hungry—it doesn't matter. What matters is that we keep them producing. We can't have them slowing down just because they're hungry."

The pigs around them muttered in agreement. None of them were particularly concerned about the well-being of the workers, but all knew that less productivity meant fewer luxuries for themselves.

Sludge continued, pacing slightly as he spoke. "We can't afford to feed them more. The bread stays with us. But they need to believe that if they work harder, if they push themselves just a bit more, things will get better for them. That's how we keep control—through hope, or at least the illusion of it."

Guzzle nodded, his eyes gleaming with understanding. "So, we promise them tomorrow. We keep their bellies empty but their minds full of promises. Work harder today, and maybe tomorrow they'll get more.We must tell them that if they work hard enough then they will become successful like us" He let out a chuckle. "It always works, doesn't it?"

Sludge grinned, a slow, knowing smile that spread across his broad face. "Exactly. They'll keep pushing themselves, trying to reach a goal that doesn't exist. We don't need to offer them anything real. We just need to dangle the possibility of something better."

One of the younger pigs, Muckley, looked up from the corner of the barn where he had been listening intently. "What if they figure it out?" he asked, his voice tinged with uncertainty. "What if they realize we're not going to give them more bread?"

Sludge turned slowly to face him, his expression hardening slightly. "Then we remind them who controls the bread," he said coldly. "If they resist, we have the dogs. But most won't resist. Most will keep working for the same reason they always have—they have no other choice."

The room fell silent for a moment as the pigs absorbed the words. They all knew the truth of Sludge's statement. The animals on the farm were too beaten down, too tired to do anything but follow the system. And if they did try to rise up, the dogs were always there to keep them in check.

Guzzle stretched lazily, brushing crumbs from his chin. "So, what's the plan?"

Sludge turned back toward the window, gazing out at the fields where the cockroaches toiled in the distance. "We'll make an announcement today," he said slowly, as if savoring the thought. "We'll tell them that if they work harder today, there's a chance they'll get more tomorrow. It's vague enough to give them hope but not specific enough for them to hold us to it. And we'll keep it going, one day at a time, always promising something just out of reach."

The pigs chuckled softly among themselves, satisfied with the plan. They knew the animals would fall for it—just like they always had.

A few hours later, as the sun reached its peak, Sludge and Guzzle stepped out of the barn and onto the raised platform that overlooked the farm. The pigs' commanding presence immediately drew the attention of the working animals below.

Victor and Ash, along with the other cockroaches, paused in their work, their antennae twitching as they looked up at the pigs. The sheep, chickens, and cows gathered around, eyes wide with anticipation. Even the donkey, Bray, stood at a distance, watching with quiet interest.

Sludge raised his voice, his words ringing out across the yard. "My fellow workers," he began, his tone oozing with false warmth, "I know times have been hard. I know you've been hungry, but I want to assure you that your efforts have not gone unnoticed."

The animals stirred slightly, some exchanging hopeful glances. Victor whispered to Ash, "Do you think they'll finally give us more?"

Before Ash could respond, Sludge continued. "We are on the brink of prosperity, but it requires just a little more from each of you. If you work harder today, if you push yourselves just a bit further, perhaps tomorrow you'll be rewarded. Work harder, and perhaps tomorrow more bread will come to those who truly deserve it."

The crowd murmured with mixed reactions. Some, like Victor, felt a surge of optimism, while others, like Ash, narrowed their eyes in suspicion. The pigs stood tall on the platform, their words sinking into the minds of the animals below.

"Keep working," Guzzle added with a sly smile, "and your rewards will come."

The announcement ended, and the pigs turned back toward their barn, leaving the animals to process what they had just heard. The day continued as it always had, but now, there was a new tension in the air—one filled with hope for some, and doubt for others.

In the far corner of the farm, just beyond the bread ovens where the cockroaches toiled, stood the donkey, Bray. His grey coat was dull and unkempt, but his eyes, deep and calculating, missed nothing. Bray wasn't like the other animals who worked and sweated under the sun. He moved slowly, deliberately, always observing, always keeping track.

While the pigs lived in luxury, Bray thrived in a different way. He controlled the bread—not through labor, but through lending. The animals came to him when their bellies ached, when they couldn't survive on the crumbs doled out by the pigs. And though his stockpile of bread was modest, it was enough to keep the others dependent on him.

As he stood watching the cockroaches push loaves in and out of the ovens, Bray slowly chewed on a piece of stale bread. He noticed Ash and Victor working nearby, their movements sluggish from the weight of exhaustion and hunger. His long ears twitched as he observed their struggle.

Ash wiped her brow with the back of her hand, her face lined with weariness. It had been days since her family had more than crumbs to eat, and she knew their rations wouldn't last the week. Her eyes flickered over to Bray, standing in the shadows, watching her.

She hesitated, but hunger drove her forward. Leaving Victor behind at the oven, she approached the donkey cautiously.

"Bray," Ash said, her voice barely above a whisper, "I need to borrow some bread. Just enough for my family to last until the pigs give us more."

Bray turned his head slowly, his gaze settling on her with a quiet, knowing look. He didn't respond immediately, letting the silence stretch long enough to remind Ash that coming to him was never a simple transaction.

"You've borrowed before, Ash," he said finally, his voice a slow, deliberate drawl. "And what do you still owe me from the last time?"

Ash bit her lip, glancing down at her feet. "I'm working on it," she murmured. "I'll repay you. I just… I need more time."

Bray tilted his head slightly, a small, patronizing smile curling at the edges of his mouth, spittle dripping. "Time," he repeated, almost amused. "Time is one thing, Ash. But bread? Bread doesn't come without a cost."

She clenched her fists at her sides, trying to keep her frustration from showing. "Please," she said quietly. "My family hasn't eaten in days. I'll pay you back—just like before."

Bray let out a slow breath, his eyes narrowing. "I'm a reasonable donkey, Ash," he said, his voice echoing false kindness. "I'll give you what you need. But you know the terms. You borrow now, and you owe me more later. A loaf today means two loaves tomorrow."

Ash swallowed hard, feeling the weight of his words. She knew she didn't have a choice. She couldn't let her family starve, and there was no other way to get enough bread to survive. But the thought of owing Bray even more filled her with a deep, sinking dread.

"Fine," she said at last, her voice barely more than a whisper. "I'll take the bread. I'll repay you."

Bray nodded, satisfied. "Good girl," he said softly, his tone condescending. "Just remember—debt doesn't disappear, Ash. It only grows. The more you take, the more you owe. Don't forget that."

She said nothing in response, simply nodding and turning back toward the ovens. As she walked away, she could feel Bray's eyes on her, watching her every step. His presence loomed large, not just over her, but over all the animals who had borrowed from him.

In the distance, Victor glanced over at her as she returned to her work, concern etched across his face. "What did he say?" Victor asked, his voice low.

Ash shook her head, forcing a tight smile. "He'll give me the bread. But we'll owe him more."

Victor sighed deeply, his shoulders slumping. "We always owe more," he muttered.

Behind them, Bray watched with a calculating gaze, already knowing that the bread he lent out today would soon come back to him—multiplied. His role on the farm was quiet, but powerful. As long as the animals borrowed from him, they would remain tied to him, and their debt would never stop growing.

The afternoon sun beat down on the bread mill as the cockroaches worked, sweat dripping from their brow as they kneaded dough, pushed it into the ovens, and waited for the loaves to rise. The heat from the ovens, combined with their exhaustion, made the work almost unbearable, but still, they toiled. There was no other choice. The bread had to be made, and though none of it would reach their hands, they worked on, driven by hunger, fear, and a faint, distant hope that things might change.

Ash wiped the back of her hand across her forehead, her muscles aching from the constant repetition of her movements. Her stomach growled, a deep and hollow reminder of how little she had eaten that morning—just a few crumbs from the bread they had been promised.

She glanced at the ovens, where loaf after loaf was pulled out and stacked high on trays, ready to be taken to the pigs. Each one was perfectly golden, its scent filling the air, teasing her empty stomach. She clenched her fists, the frustration bubbling up inside her, hot and bitter.

"How much more?" Ash muttered under her breath. "How much more can we give them?" She knew the answer, of course. They would give everything. They always had, and they always would.

Beside her, Victor worked silently, his expression grim but determined. He had always been the hopeful one, always trying to believe that their hard work would eventually pay off. But even he was beginning to look worn down by the endless cycle of labor and hunger.

Suddenly, a small, frail cockroach—barely more than a child—stumbled past them, her hands shaking as she tried to carry a tray of dough to the oven. Her legs wobbled, and the tray slipped from her grasp, sending the dough tumbling to the ground. The cockroach froze, her eyes wide with fear as she looked around, expecting punishment.

Without hesitation, Victor stepped forward. He crouched down beside her, scooping up a small portion of the dough and handing it back to her with a kind smile. Then, reaching into his own meager pouch, he pulled out a few crumbs of bread—his own ration—and pressed them into her trembling hands.

"Here," he said softly, "take this. It’s not much, but it’ll help."

The young cockroach stared at him in disbelief, her eyes welling up with gratitude. She clutched the crumbs to her chest, murmuring a quiet "Thank you," before scurrying off to finish her task.

Ash watched the scene unfold, her heart heavy. "You shouldn’t have done that," she said quietly as Victor returned to her side. "You barely have enough for yourself."

Victor shrugged, wiping his hands on his apron. "She needed it more than I do," he said simply. "We’re all struggling, Ash. What good is loyalty if we don’t help each other survive?"

Ash looked at him, her eyes narrowing. "Loyalty won’t fill your belly, Victor," she replied bitterly. "And it won’t change the fact that no matter how much we work, we’ll never get more than crumbs."

He sighed, glancing up toward the pigs’ barn in the distance. "Maybe not," he admitted, his voice quiet. "But it’s the only thing keeping us going."

As they spoke, the pigs were gathered near the barn, completely oblivious to the cockroaches' suffering. From their comfortable position on the hill, they lazed in the midday sun, their massive bodies rolling lazily in the thick mud that surrounded the barnyard. Their bellies were full, bloated from the feast of bread they had devoured earlier. Loaves of bread—far more than they could ever need—were stacked high around them, some already half-eaten, others left discarded in the mud as if they were nothing more than toys to be played with.

Sludge lay on his side, snorting and squealing in pleasure as he stuffed his face with another chunk of bread. He barely chewed, just swallowed hungrily, crumbs falling from his mouth as he reached for another loaf. Guzzle, lounging next to him, rolled over with a loud, contented fart, his legs kicking out lazily as he laughed.

"This is the life, Guzzle," Sludge said between mouthfuls, his voice thick with satisfaction. "All the bread we could ever want, and all we have to do is keep them working."

Guzzle oinked in agreement, stretching out in the mud, his belly round and full. "Let them work for it," he said with a snort. "They'll never know what it's like to be us. Look at them down there, scurrying around for crumbs. It's pathetic."

The pigs burst into a fit of squeals and laughter, their voices loud and obnoxious as they devoured the bread without a care in the world. They rolled in the mud, grunting and farting in pleasure, their eyes half-closed in bliss as the sun warmed their fat, lazy bodies.

From below, Ash and Victor could see the pigs from where they stood. Ash's lips pressed into a thin line as she watched them, her anger simmering beneath the surface.

"Look at them," she whispered bitterly. "They don't care. We break ourselves to make their bread, and they roll in it like it's nothing. How much longer are we supposed to do this?"

Victor didn't answer. He didn't need to. The sight of the pigs, bloated and content, was answer enough.

As the afternoon drew on and the heat from the sun began to soften, a sudden noise echoed across the farm. The squeal of a pig rang out, sharp and commanding, drawing the attention of all the animals below. From the grand barn on the hill, Guzzle stood on the platform, flanked by several other pigs, all of them looking smug and important. A ripple of anticipation spread through the animals as they gathered near the base of the barn to listen.

The pigs only addressed the farm when they had something important to say—or when they needed to manipulate the workers into giving more. The cockroaches, sheep, chickens, and cows shuffled in closer, their faces tired but curious. Even the dogs, the pigs' protectors, stood at the edges of the gathering, watching with sharp, keen eyes.

Guzzle stepped forward, raising his voice with an air of authority. "My dear friends," he began, his tone oozing with false warmth, "your efforts have not gone unnoticed. We have seen how hard you've worked—day in, day out, to ensure the farm prospers. It is because of you that this farm thrives, and it is because of you that the future is bright."

The animals murmured among themselves, a mix of weariness and faint hope flickering in their eyes. Victor leaned forward slightly, listening intently. Ash, standing beside him, crossed her arms, her face skeptical.

"We know that times have been hard," Guzzle continued, glancing over the crowd with a practiced look of concern. "But I promise you, if you keep working, if you keep pushing yourselves just a little more, things will change. Your hard work will be rewarded. There will be more bread for everyone—soon."

A wave of murmurs passed through the crowd. Some of the animals, especially the younger ones, perked up at the mention of more bread. Victor straightened, a glimmer of optimism in his eyes. "Did you hear that, Ash?" he whispered. "They said we'll get more. We just have to hold on a little longer."

But Ash said nothing, her eyes fixed on Guzzle as he continued his speech. She had heard these promises before. She had heard them every time the animals had worked harder, every time they had been told that things would get better, and every time, the only ones who prospered were the pigs.

"Work harder today, and tomorrow will bring change," Guzzle said with a grand gesture, his voice filled with performative passion. "You've already seen how much this farm can grow. You've seen how far we've come. But there is more to achieve—more to share! So keep going, my friends. Together, we will all rise."

The pigs standing beside him nodded approvingly, some of them oinking softly in agreement. The crowd below was stirring now, whispers of hope spreading among the animals. Some of the sheep and cows looked genuinely encouraged, nodding to one another as if the pigs' words had rekindled their belief in a fair future.

Guzzle raised his hoof dramatically. "The bread will come, my friends. The rewards will come."

With that, the speech was over. Guzzle and the other pigs retreated into the barn, leaving the animals to disperse back to their tasks. The dogs resumed their patrols, ensuring the animals returned to work with no trouble. The crowd began to thin, but the air buzzed with quiet conversations as the animals discussed the pigs' words, some with hope, others with doubt.

Victor turned to Ash, his eyes wide with cautious optimism. "See, Ash? They said it again—things will get better. They wouldn't keep telling us that if it weren't true."

Ash didn't respond right away. She stared at the barn, her jaw set tight, her brow furrowed in thought. After a long pause, she finally shook her head, her voice low and filled with frustration. "How many times are we going to believe that?" she asked. "How many times have they promised us more, and how many times have we ended up with the same crumbs?"

Victor frowned, glancing down at the ground. "But maybe this time it's different," he said quietly. "Maybe this time, they really mean it. They see how hard we're working. They wouldn't keep saying it if they didn't plan to follow through."

Ash shot him a sharp look, her voice harder now. "Victor, it's always the same. They keep us working with promises that never come true. They dangle the idea of a better tomorrow in front of us so we'll keep breaking our backs for them. And every time, we're left with nothing but crumbs while they feast."

Victor opened his mouth to argue, but no words came out. He wanted to believe that things would change, that the pigs would make good on their promises, but even he was starting to feel the weight of the truth. He looked over at the ovens where they had been working all day, the piles of bread ready to be taken to the pigs, and his stomach twisted with hunger.

"Maybe," he said softly, almost to himself, "maybe it will be different this time."

Ash sighed, her frustration giving way to exhaustion. She placed a hand on his shoulder, her voice gentler now. "I know you want to believe that, Victor. We all do. But they're never going to give us more. They can't. They need us to stay hungry, to keep us working. The pigs will never share the bread."

Victor didn't respond. He stared at the ground, the faint hope he had felt during Guzzle's speech slowly fading away. Deep down, he knew Ash was right. But part of him—maybe the part that was desperate for something better—still clung to the idea that maybe, just maybe, things could change.

They stood in silence for a moment, watching the other animals return to their work. The faint scent of bread filled the air, a cruel reminder of what they would never have.

"We'll see," Victor said at last, his voice quiet and uncertain. "Maybe we'll see."

Ash gave him a sad, knowing smile. "Maybe," she repeated, though her tone held no hope.

The Cycle

The next morning broke just like the last, the pale light of dawn creeping across the farm as the cockroaches gathered once again at the bread mill. The air was still cool, but the warmth from the ovens had already begun to turn the workhouse into a stifling furnace. The sound of dough being slapped onto stone, the quiet murmurs of tired voices, and the rhythmic clinking of trays filled the space.

Ash and Victor were back at their usual spot, their hands moving mechanically as they kneaded dough and prepared it for the ovens. Their bodies ached, their eyes dull from lack of sleep, but the work never stopped. It couldn't. The bread had to keep flowing, and the pigs were always watching.

"Another day, another crumb," Ash muttered under her breath, pressing her fingers into the dough with a bit more force than necessary. Her frustration bubbled just beneath the surface, barely contained by the monotony of the work.

Victor glanced over at her, his expression weary but patient. "We're all feeling it," he said softly, his voice tinged with fatigue. "But what else can we do?"

Ash paused for a moment, her hands resting on the dough as she looked up at the pile of freshly baked loaves stacked near the ovens. The smell of bread, rich and warm, filled the air, but it brought no comfort—only hunger. She shook her head, her voice edged with bitterness. "We do all this, Victor, and for what? A few crumbs?"

Victor let out a slow sigh, wiping sweat from his brow. "I know it doesn’t seem fair," he admitted, "but we have to keep going. If we don’t…" His voice trailed off, the unspoken threat hanging between them.

Ash understood what he meant. If they didn’t work, they wouldn’t eat. And if they couldn’t eat, they wouldn’t survive. But the weight of it, the crushing cycle of endless labor for so little in return, gnawed at her every day.

"I’m tired, Victor," she said quietly, her hands resuming their work. "Tired of giving everything and getting almost nothing."

Before Victor could respond, a sudden clatter rang out from across the mill. The sharp sound of metal hitting stone echoed through the air, and all eyes turned toward the source. A young cockroach, struggling under the weight of a heavy tray, had dropped a full load of freshly baked loaves onto the ground.

The bread scattered across the floor, some of it rolling into the dust, while the cockroach stood frozen in place, her eyes wide with fear. For a moment, the mill fell silent. Then, almost immediately, the dogs appeared.

Rex and Buster, the pigs' loyal enforcers, came striding forward with a menacing growl. Their muscular forms cut through the rows of cockroaches, their eyes locked on the trembling worker. The other cockroaches shrank back, lowering their heads, knowing what was about to come.

Rex was the first to reach the young cockroach. His teeth bared in a snarl as he snapped at the air, his voice a low, threatening growl. "What do you think you're doing?" he barked, his massive paw stomping down near the fallen bread. "Do you know how much work that bread took? How dare you waste it!"

The young cockroach stammered, her voice shaking as she tried to apologize. "I—I'm sorry! It was too heavy, I didn't mean to—"

But Buster cut her off, stepping forward to loom over her with a sneer. "Too heavy? Too heavy? If you can’t handle the work, maybe you shouldn’t be here at all.*"

Victor took a step forward, as if to intervene, but Ash quickly grabbed his arm, shaking her head. "Don’t," she whispered urgently. "You’ll only make it worse."

Victor hesitated, his face tight with frustration, but he stayed where he was. They had both seen what happened to those who tried to stand up to the dogs. It never ended well.

The young cockroach cowered on the ground, her antennae twitching with fear as the dogs circled her. Rex kicked at the fallen loaves with disdain, sending them skidding across the floor. "Look at this mess," he growled. "The pigs aren’t going to be happy about this."

Buster snarled in agreement, his teeth flashing as he bent down toward the terrified cockroach. "You’ll pay for this. You’ll pay for every loaf that was lost."

Without another word, the dogs hauled her to her feet and dragged her toward the back of the mill, their growls echoing through the air. The other cockroaches remained silent, their eyes downcast, too afraid to speak or intervene.

Victor clenched his fists, his jaw tight with anger. "This isn't right," he muttered under his breath, his voice trembling with restrained fury. "She didn't deserve that."

Ash shook her head slowly, her voice soft but bitter. "None of us deserve any of this."

They both turned back to their work, their hearts heavy, but their hands moving all the same. There was no room for rebellion here, not now. The bread still needed to be made, the cycle still had to continue. And deep down, they both knew that today would end just like every other day—with them exhausted and hungry.

As the sun began its slow descent toward the horizon, casting long shadows across the farm, the cockroaches moved sluggishly through their final rounds of the day. The bread mill was quieter now, but the tension hung thick in the air, lingering after the incident with the dogs. Each cockroach kept their head down, focusing on their work, avoiding any more trouble before the day was done.

Ash was tired, her muscles aching from hours of kneading and baking. But more than the physical exhaustion, a deeper, gnawing sense of hopelessness had settled inside her. The weight of it sat heavy on her chest as she stacked the last of the loaves, preparing them to be taken to the pigs.

Just as she finished her task, a familiar figure emerged from the shadows of the barn. It was Bray, the donkey. His slow, deliberate steps carried him toward Ash, his hooves clacking softly on the ground. His eyes, sharp and calculating, fixed on her as he approached.

Ash's stomach tightened. She had been dreading this moment. She knew why Bray had come—he always came when her hands were empty and her debts loomed over her.

"Ash," Bray said in his slow, measured tone as he came to a stop in front of her. "We need to talk."

She turned to face him, her hands instinctively clenching into fists at her sides. "I know," she replied quietly, already bracing herself for what was coming. "I haven't forgotten."

Bray raised an eyebrow, his expression calm but unyielding. "Haven't forgotten, perhaps. But it's been a while since you've given me what you owe."

Ash's jaw tightened. "I've been working, Bray. You know I have. But it's not enough. The pigs barely give us anything—how am I supposed to pay you when I can hardly feed myself?"

Bray tilted his head slightly, his gaze never wavering. "That's not my concern, Ash. You agreed to our arrangement, didn't you? You took what you needed, and now it's time to give it back."

Ash felt the frustration rise in her chest, but she fought to keep her voice steady. "I'm not asking for much, Bray. Just a little more time. I'm doing everything I can, but the pigs—" She stopped herself, knowing that talking about the pigs wouldn't change anything. "I'll pay you back, but you have to give me more time."

Bray's expression didn't change. He remained as calm and cold as ever, his voice steady as he spoke. "Time isn't something I give for free, Ash. You knew that when you came to me. You wanted bread, and I gave it to you. But nothing on this farm comes without a price."

Ash bit her lip, her fists tightening at her sides. "I know that," she said through gritted teeth. "But you know how hard it is out here. We're barely getting by. Can't you give me a little leniency this time?"

Bray's eyes flickered with something like amusement, though his tone remained serious. "Leniency?" he repeated slowly. "I'm afraid leniency isn't in the nature of our agreement, Ash. You owe, and I expect you to pay."

She stared at him, the hopelessness growing inside her with every word. There was no reasoning with Bray. There never had been. Every loaf she had borrowed, every crumb she had taken—it all came with a cost, and Bray was never one to forget.

"And if I can't?" Ash asked quietly, her voice barely above a whisper.

Bray didn't hesitate. "Then you'll find a way," he said simply, his tone casual, as if they were discussing nothing more than the weather. "Because if you don't, things will get... difficult. For you, for your family."

The threat hung in the air between them, unspoken but clear. Ash knew what Bray meant. If she couldn't repay him, there would be consequences. She had seen it happen before—cockroaches who had borrowed too much, who had fallen too far behind. They had disappeared from the bread mill, taken away by the dogs or left to fend for themselves. And no one ever spoke of them again.

Ash swallowed hard, her heart pounding in her chest. "I'll pay," she said at last, her voice tight with defeat. "I'll figure it out."

Bray gave a slow, satisfied nod. "I knew you would," he said, his voice dripping with cold assurance. "You always do. Just remember, Ash... He leaned in slightly, his eyes narrowing. "When you take, you always have to give back more. That's how it works. That's how it's always worked."

She didn't respond. There was nothing left to say. Bray turned and walked away, his hooves echoing softly as he disappeared into the distance, leaving Ash standing there, feeling the weight of the unbreakable cycle pressing down on her shoulders.

She watched him go, her fists still clenched, her mind racing. No matter how hard she worked, no matter how much she gave, it would never be enough. She was trapped—trapped by the pigs, trapped by the work, and now, trapped by Bray. There was no escaping it. There was only survival, and that meant doing whatever it took to keep going, even if it meant giving more than she could ever get back.

The sun dipped lower in the sky, casting a soft orange glow over the farm as the animals began to finish their day's work. The bread mill was quiet now, save for the low murmurs of conversation as the cockroaches and other animals gathered in small groups, trying to unwind after another grueling day.

A crow landed on a fence post and crackled : "Hard work will lead to success. Just more effort, and you too could live like the pigs!"

Ash and Victor sat together near the edge of the mill, their backs resting against the stone wall, the faint smell of bread still lingering in the air. They were exhausted, their limbs heavy from hours of labor, but the rest was short-lived. Tomorrow would be the same—a day of work, a few crumbs to survive, and no end in sight.

As they sat in silence, a group of sheep slowly approached, their heads hanging low and their wool dirty from a long day of work in the fields. The sheep, though not as numerous as the cockroaches, had their own role on the farm, tending to the wheat fields and producing wool for the pigs' luxuries. Despite their contributions, they, too, received little in return.

One of the sheep, a weary-looking ewe named Mala, let out a long sigh as she flopped down beside Ash and Victor, her face etched with frustration.

"Another day of nothing," Mala muttered, her voice thick with exhaustion. "I'm starting to think all this hard work isn't getting us anywhere."

Victor glanced over at her, nodding in sympathy. "We're all feeling it," he said quietly. "We work day and night, but nothing seems to change. The pigs keep promising us more, but we never see any of it."

The other sheep nodded in agreement, their tired eyes reflecting the same hopelessness that had settled over the cockroaches. A young ram, his wool matted with dust, spoke up. "They tell us if we just keep working harder, we'll get more," he said, his voice filled with disbelief. "But no matter how hard we work, it's always the same. We get a little, and they get everything."

Ash leaned forward, her eyes narrowing as she looked at the group of sheep. "Why do you still believe them, then?" she asked, her tone sharp. "Why do you keep working when you know it won't change anything?"

Mala hesitated, her eyes dropping to the ground. "It's not that we believe them," she said softly. "But what else can we do? They control everything—the food source, the means of production, even the dogs. If we stop working, what's left for us?" She paused, her voice heavy with resignation. "And... what if this time they mean it? What if this time, we actually do get more?"

Victor leaned back against the wall, his expression thoughtful. "That's how they keep us going," he said quietly. "They dangle the idea of a better future in front of us, just close enough that we think we can reach it. But we never do. And while we're chasing it, they're taking everything for themselves."

Another sheep, an older ram with graying wool, grumbled from his place nearby. "It's the same story every time," he muttered. "They keep telling us we're part of something bigger, that if we work together, everyone will benefit. But it's all lies. The pigs get fatter, and we stay hungry."

Mala let out a frustrated breath, shaking her head. "I don't understand how they get away with it," she said bitterly. "They make it sound so fair. They tell us we're all equal, that we're all contributing to the success of the farm, but look around. Does this look fair to you?"

Ash glanced around the farm, her eyes scanning the tired faces of the animals, the worn-out bodies, the crumbling hope. It didn't look fair at all. The pigs, up in their luxurious barn, were living off the hard work of everyone else. And yet, somehow, they managed to convince the animals that they were all part of the same system, working toward the same goal.

"It's not fair," Ash said quietly. "But they've built this whole thing to make it look like it is. They tell us that the harder we work, the more we'll get. They make sure that we believe it, because if we didn't, none of us would keep going."

Victor nodded in agreement, his eyes dark with understanding. "That's how they control us," he added. "They make us believe that if we fail, it's our fault—that we didn't work hard enough, or that we didn't do enough for the farm. But the truth is, no matter how hard we work, we'll never get what they have. They've rigged it from the start."

The group of sheep sat in silence for a moment, absorbing Victor's words. There was no arguing with the truth of it. The pigs had created a system that gave the illusion of fairness—one that kept the animals working hard, hoping for a future that would never come.

Finally, Mala spoke up again, her voice tinged with quiet desperation. "So what do we do?" she asked. "If everything's rigged against us, how do we ever get out of this?"

Ash looked over at Mala, her eyes hard but thoughtful. "We stop believing their lies," she said firmly. "We stop playing their game. As long as we keep working for the pigs, we're just feeding their power. Maybe it's time we start thinking about how to take that power back."

The words hung in the air, heavy and dangerous. The sheep glanced at each other, unsure but intrigued. It wasn't the first time Ash had spoken out like this, but the weight of her words was starting to resonate. The pigs had always managed to keep control by promising a future that never arrived, but if the animals began to question that—if they began to see through the illusion of fairness—their grip on the farm might start to slip.

For now, though, the cycle continued. The animals worked, the pigs feasted, and the promise of a better tomorrow remained just out of reach.

As the evening shadows stretched long over the farm, the day's labor finally came to an end. The cockroaches, sheep, and other animals returned to their resting spots, their bodies aching and their minds clouded with exhaustion. But unlike other nights, the usual silence wasn't settling over the farm. There was something different in the air, something that hadn't been there before: a quiet, simmering tension that seemed to hum just beneath the surface.

Ash and Victor sat together in the corner of the mill, away from the others. The low murmur of conversation buzzed around them, but they kept their voices low, exchanging cautious glances. They had seen it, too—the way the animals had started looking at each other, the way their usual resignation had begun to shift into something more dangerous.

"Have you noticed it?" Ash asked quietly, her eyes scanning the farmyard as she spoke. "The others… they're starting to talk more. Not just the sheep, either. I heard the chickens whispering earlier today. They're not happy, Victor. They're tired of waiting for change that never comes."

Victor nodded, his expression thoughtful. "I've seen it," he admitted, leaning in slightly to keep their conversation private. "It's not just frustration anymore. It's something else… something heavier. The way the pigs talk down to us, the way the dogs hover over everything we do… it's wearing on them. On all of us."

Ash's brow furrowed as she considered his words. She had been feeling it, too. That restless energy, the sense that the farm was on the edge of something. It was subtle, but it was there—a current running through the animals that had been absent before. And with each passing day, it grew stronger.

"The pigs think they can keep control," Ash continued, her voice barely above a whisper. "But how long can they really hold on when everyone's starting to see through their lies?"

Victor sighed, running a hand through his antennae. "I don't know," he admitted, his voice soft but serious. "But I can tell you this: animals are scared. They don't trust the pigs, but they're afraid of what might happen if they speak up. You saw what the dogs did today. That poor cockroach—they don't care if it was an accident. They just want to remind us what happens if we step out of line."

Ash nodded, her expression darkening. "I know," she said, her voice low and tense. "But that fear… it's starting to change. It's not just fear anymore. It's anger. And that's dangerous."

They both fell silent for a moment, their eyes drifting toward the barn where the pigs lived in comfort, oblivious to the restlessness spreading below. The pigs had always maintained control through fear—fear of hunger, fear of the dogs, fear of losing what little the other animals had. But now, that fear was being overshadowed by something else: the desire for change.

"I heard someone mention it today," Ash said after a pause, her voice barely a whisper. "Rebellion."

Victor looked up sharply, his eyes wide with concern. "Who?"

Ash shook her head, not wanting to say too much. "I don't know. I just overheard it… in passing. But it wasn't just one animal. It's spreading. They are starting to wonder if we could really do it—if we could take the farm back."

Victor's expression tightened, a mixture of fear and cautious hope flashing across his face. "You really think it could happen?" he asked softly. "After all this time?"

Ash looked at him, her eyes hard but hopeful. "Why not?" she asked, her voice gaining a bit of strength. "Look at us, Victor. We do all the work. We make all the bread. Without us, the pigs would have nothing. It's only because they've kept us divided and afraid that we've stayed under their control for this long. But what if… what if we all stopped being afraid? What if we stopped working for them?"

Victor was silent for a moment, his gaze dropping to the ground as he thought. The idea of rebellion, of standing up to the pigs and the dogs, was both thrilling and terrifying. The risks were enormous—he had seen what happened to those who resisted. But at the same time, he couldn't help but feel the spark of possibility igniting in his chest. Could they really do it? Could they really take back the farm?

"It's dangerous," Victor said at last, his voice cautious. "If we try and fail… the pigs won't just punish us. They'll make sure no one ever tries again. The dogs… they'd tear us apart before we even got close."

Ash nodded, her eyes narrowing. "I know it's dangerous," she admitted. "But isn't it dangerous to keep doing this, too? To keep living like this—always hungry, always tired, always waiting for something that will never come? How much longer can we survive like this, Victor?"

Her words hit him hard, and Victor knew she was right. The cycle they were trapped in, the endless work for crumbs—it wasn't sustainable. Eventually, something would have to give. The question was whether the animals would wait for the pigs to take everything, or if they would decide to take matters into their own hands.

"So what do we do?" Victor asked, his voice quiet but serious.

Ash leaned in closer, her eyes filled with determination. "We keep watching. We listen. And when the time comes, we'll know. Others are already talking, Victor. The rebellion is starting —slowly, but it's starting. And when the moment is right, we'll be ready."

For a moment, the weight of her words hung between them. Victor felt his heart pounding in his chest, a mix of fear and anticipation swirling inside him. The farm had always been ruled by the pigs, always controlled by their promises and their threats. But now, for the first time, there was a real possibility that things could change. That the animals, united in their anger and frustration, might finally rise up and reclaim what was theirs.

The thought was both exhilarating and terrifying.

"I just hope we don't wait too long," Victor said softly, glancing back toward the barn where the pigs slept soundly, unaware of the storm brewing beneath them.

Ash nodded, her eyes hard with resolve. "We won't," she promised. "When the time comes, we won't."

Inside the grand barn, far removed from the unrest brewing below, the pigs gathered once again. The air inside was cool, the scent of freshly baked bread lingering in the corners of the lavish room. Plush piles of hay served as their thrones, and they reclined lazily, their bellies

full, as they looked out over the farm from the large windows that framed the scene like a picture.

Sludge, the oldest and most cunning of the pigs, stood at the center of the room, his sharp eyes surveying his fellow pigs. Around him, Guzzle, Muckley, and a few others lounged comfortably, but their expressions carried a hint of concern, something that hadn't been there before.

"The animals are getting restless," Guzzle said, breaking the silence. He scratched his snout with a hoof, glancing nervously out the window at the distant figures of the cockroaches and sheep below. "It's starting to spread. They're talking more, whispering when they think we're not listening."

Sludge nodded slowly, his face calm but thoughtful. "I've noticed it too," he admitted, pacing slightly as he spoke. "They're growing tired of the promises. They're beginning to realize that no matter how hard they work, they'll never get what they've been hoping for."

Muckley, a smaller pig with a nervous twitch, shifted uncomfortably in his seat. "Do you think they'll try something?" he asked, his voice filled with apprehension. "What if they stop working? What if they… rebel?"

Sludge stopped his pacing and looked directly at Muckley, a slow, calculating smile spreading across his face. "They won't," he said confidently. "Not yet, anyway. They're angry, yes, but they're still too afraid. And that fear is what keeps them in line. As long as they believe that we hold all the power, they won't risk losing what little they have."

The other pigs murmured in agreement, but the tension in the room remained. They knew Sludge was right—fear had always been their greatest tool—but they also knew that fear could only go so far. The animals were reaching their breaking point, and it was only a matter of time before the anger outweighed the fear.

"So what do we do?" Guzzle asked, his voice low. "We can't just ignore this. If they stop working… if they rise up, we could lose everything."

Sludge's smile didn't fade. Instead, it widened as a new thought took root in his mind. "We don't ignore it," he said smoothly, his tone carrying a sense of quiet authority. "We give them what they want."

Muckley blinked, confused. "What do you mean? Give them more bread?"

Sludge let out a short, derisive snort. "Of course not. We don't give them more bread. We give them the idea that things are going to change." He paused for effect, his eyes gleaming with satisfaction as the realization dawned on the others.

"An election," Sludge continued, pacing once again. "We hold an election. Let them think they have a say in how the farm is run. We'll let them choose one of us to 'lead,' and in doing so, they'll believe that things are going to get better".

Guzzle perked up, his face lighting with understanding. "An election," he repeated, nodding slowly. "That could work. If they think they're part of the decision, they'll be less likely to rebel."

Sludge grinned, pleased with Guzzle's enthusiasm. "Exactly. We let them believe that they have a choice, that they have some control over their future. We'll continue to take the bread, we'll continue to control the dogs, and they'll continue to work—just as they always have."

The room buzzed with quiet approval as the pigs began to see the brilliance of Sludge's plan. It wasn't about giving the animals actual power. It was about giving them the illusion of power—the idea that they were working toward something better, even if that something never came.

Muckley, still cautious, raised a question. "But what if they figure it out? What if they realize it's just a game?"

Sludge waved a hoof dismissively. "They won't. Not right away, at least. The promise of change is enough to keep them distracted for now. And if they start to question it later, we'll just come up with another excuse, another promise of something better. We'll keep them chasing a future that never comes."

The other pigs nodded in agreement, their fears now quelled by Sludge's confidence. The election would be enough to placate the animals, to keep them working and believing in a system that was entirely rigged against them.

Sludge turned back to the window, gazing out at the farm below. The animals moved like shadows in the fading light, unaware of the plans being made above them. A slow smile crept across his face as he spoke one final time, his voice filled with smug satisfaction.

"Let them think they have a choice," he said softly, almost to himself. "That's all they need to keep going."

Whispers in the Barn

The next morning began much like any other. The soft hum of the farm waking up, the animals moving in tired, familiar rhythms, and the cockroaches heading straight to the bread mill to begin their daily toil. But there was something else in the air now—something heavier, quieter, yet unmistakable. Doubt.

As Ash and Victor worked alongside the other cockroaches, the usual tired conversations had shifted. There was less talk about how much bread they would get or how long the day would be, and more about the growing realization that nothing would ever change, no matter how hard they worked. Every once in a while, Ash would catch snippets of conversations from the others, the same doubts she had been feeling echoed in their words.

"It’s been years, and we still get the same crumbs," one cockroach muttered as he kneaded a lump of dough, his hands moving slowly. "They always promise more, but it never comes."

"They’ll never give us more," another one said under his breath, his antennae twitching with frustration. "They only care about themselves."

Ash felt a strange comfort in hearing these words. She wasn’t alone. It wasn’t just her and Victor who saw it—others were starting to wake up, too. Maybe it had been Sludge's last speech that had finally pushed them over the edge. Maybe it was the endless cycle of hunger and false promises. Whatever it was, the animals were growing restless, and Ash knew it was only a matter of time before that restlessness turned into something bigger.

During a break, Ash moved away from the ovens, walking quietly through the mill until she found a small group of cockroaches gathered in the shadows. They were huddled together, talking in low voices, their faces drawn and serious.

"What’s the point anymore?" one of them said, his voice barely above a whisper. "We’re never going to get more than this. No matter how much we work, it’s always the same."

"They say there’s going to be an election soon," another added, her voice dripping with sarcasm. "Like that’s going to change anything. One pig or another, it’s all the same to us."

Ash stepped closer, lowering her voice as she joined the conversation. "You’re right," she said firmly, her eyes scanning the group. "Nothing’s going to change unless we make it change. The pigs won’t give us more, and the election is just another trick to keep us working. But if we all stop believing their lies, they’ll lose their power over us."

The other cockroaches glanced at each other, their antennae twitching nervously. They had never heard Ash speak so boldly before, and the weight of her words hung heavy in the air.

"What can we do, though?" one of them asked, her voice filled with doubt. "The pigs control everything. The bread, the dogs… they’ll never let us stop working."

Ash’s eyes hardened. "They only have power because we give it to them. We’re the ones making the bread, aren’t we? Without us, they wouldn’t have anything. If enough of us stop believing in their promises, if enough of us stop being afraid, maybe we can finally do something about it."

There was a tense silence after her words, as if the air itself had thickened with the weight of what she was saying. The other cockroaches shifted uncomfortably, glancing around to make sure no one else was listening. The idea of rising up, of challenging the pigs, was dangerous. But it was also tempting.

Before anyone could respond, a low growl echoed from the edge of the mill. The cockroaches stiffened, their eyes widening in fear as Rex and Buster, the pigs’ loyal dogs, strolled into view. The dogs were massive, their hulking bodies covered in scars from years of keeping the farm in check. They moved with a predatory grace, their eyes scanning the workers with lazy disdain.

Ash quickly stepped back, her heart pounding in her chest as the dogs approached. They had overheard, she was sure of it. Her stomach twisted with fear—this could be the end. But to her surprise, the dogs didn't stop. They merely glanced at the group of cockroaches, their ears twitching as they passed by, but they said nothing. It was as if they had decided it wasn't worth the effort to confront them.

"Look at 'em," Rex muttered to Buster, his lips curling into a sneer. "All that whispering. Think they're smarter than us, huh?"

Buster snorted. "Let 'em talk," he said, his voice thick with disdain. "Doesn't change a thing. They'll be back at the ovens tomorrow, same as always. They always are."

The two dogs walked off, their growls fading into the background as they disappeared back into the shadows. For a moment, the cockroaches stood frozen in place, unsure of what had just happened.

"They heard us," one of the cockroaches whispered, her voice trembling. "What if they tell the pigs?"

Ash shook her head, her fear quickly being replaced by a cold, simmering anger. "They won't," she said, her voice steady. "They don't care what we say, because they think we're too scared to do anything about it. But maybe we're not."

The others looked at her, a mix of uncertainty and hope in their eyes. The dogs had dismissed them as harmless, but the doubts had already started to spread. And once those doubts took root, Ash knew, it would be impossible to stop them from growing.

High up in the grand barn, far from the workers below, Sludge sat comfortably on a thick pile of hay, the scent of freshly baked bread filling the air. The barn was bathed in the soft glow of the late morning sun, a stark contrast to the dusty workyards outside. Guzzle lounged beside him, picking lazily at a loaf of bread, while several other pigs sprawled about, their bodies heavy and their minds at ease. They had everything they needed—power, bread, and control.

But today, Sludge awaited a different kind of visitor. From beyond the farm, a small, clever squirrel named Tham was on his way. Tham had connections to other farms, and more importantly, he had a stockpile of bread that the pigs needed to keep their system going. The cockroaches worked hard, yes, but with the growing unrest on the farm, Sludge knew it was crucial to maintain appearances and keep the flow of bread uninterrupted.

A sharp knock echoed through the barn doors, and with a nod from Sludge, Tham was ushered in by a pair of dogs. The squirrel moved quickly and gracefully, his small body in constant motion, his eyes darting around the luxurious barn with a mix of curiosity and caution.

"Sludge," Tham greeted, his voice light but cautious. "It's been a long time. I hear things are… well, as always, busy here."

Sludge smiled warmly, spreading his large form across his seat. "Ah, Tham... welcome, welcome. Yes, the farm is flourishing, as you can see." He gestured toward the piles of bread

stacked high behind him, though not as high as they once were. "Thanks, of course, to the hard work of our loyal workers."

Tham glanced at the bread and then back at Sludge, his sharp eyes narrowing slightly. "I hear the cockroaches have been struggling. Rumors spread quickly, even between farms. But that's why I'm here, isn't it?"

Sludge's smile didn't falter, but his eyes darkened ever so slightly. "Yes, well... you know how these things go, Tham. Workers always grumble. It's part of the cycle. But everything is well under control." He leaned forward, his tone smooth and reassuring. "In fact, we've just announced an election to boost morale. The animals think they'll soon have a say in how the farm is run. It keeps them... productive."

Tham tilted his head, clearly unimpressed by Sludge's attempts to gloss over the tension. "I'm not here for politics, Sludge. I'm here because your bread supply is running thin, and you know it. You need more to keep things moving. That's why you reached out."

Sludge's smile widened, though it didn't reach his eyes. "Ah, straight to business then. Very well." He gestured for Tham to take a seat, and the squirrel obliged, perching on a small stool made of hay. "You're right, of course. We've had some… interruptions, but nothing that can't be managed. What we need now is a bit of support. A temporary loan, so to speak. You have the surplus, and we have the… demand."

Tham crossed his arms, leaning back slightly. "And what do I get in return? You've asked me for bread before, Sludge, and I've given it. But I've yet to see any repayment."

Sludge waved a hoof dismissively, his voice calm and reassuring. "We're all part of the same system, Tham. You help us now, and in the future, when we're back on our feet, you'll be repaid handsomely. You'll have your bread—more than you lent us." He leaned forward slightly, his tone growing softer, as if to emphasize his sincerity. "But you know as well as I do that keeping the farm stable is in everyone's best interest. The cockroaches will keep working, the bread will keep flowing, and soon, we'll all be better off for it."

Tham's sharp eyes flickered with a hint of doubt. "You're asking me to keep supporting a system that seems… fragile at best. What happens if the cockroaches stop working? What happens if this little election of yours doesn't settle them down?"

Sludge chuckled, a deep, rumbling sound that seemed to shake the walls. "Oh, Tham, you worry too much. The cockroaches always work. They have no choice. Hunger keeps them in line, and as long as they need food, they'll keep producing bread. We've been doing this for years—this system works."

Tham remained quiet for a moment, tapping his small claws against the edge of the stool. He wasn't naive—he knew the pigs were playing a dangerous game. They had been borrowing from his surplus for seasons now, each time with promises of repayment that never came. But Tham also knew that his own farm benefited from the pigs' bread production. If Sludge's farm collapsed, it would send ripples through the surrounding farms, and no one wanted that.

"I'll lend you the bread," Tham said finally, his voice firm but laced with caution. "But this time, Sludge, I expect to see something in return. You say the cockroaches will keep

working, that everything will keep flowing. Fine. But if things start to fall apart, don't expect me to keep bailing you out."

Sludge leaned back, a satisfied grin spreading across his face. "You have my word, Tham. The bread will come. The cockroaches will work. And in the end, we all benefit from this arrangement. Trust me."

Tham nodded slowly, though there was a flicker of doubt in his eyes. He stood from his seat, giving Sludge one last glance. "We'll see," he said quietly, his voice barely audible over the soft crackling of the barn's fire.

As Tham turned to leave, Sludge's smile remained fixed on his face. The squirrel might be sharp, but he didn't see the whole picture. The bread he lent would never be repaid—not in full, anyway. That was the nature of the system. The bread kept flowing, the animals kept working, and the pigs kept control. As long as the cockroaches toiled away, nothing would change.

When Tham finally disappeared out the barn doors, Sludge leaned back in his seat and let out a satisfied grunt. Guzzle looked over from his seat, raising an eyebrow.

"You think he knows he'll never see that bread again?" Guzzle asked, smirking.

Sludge chuckled softly. "He has no idea," he said. "He has hopes and trust for us. The system works because we all pretend it does. As long as the bread keeps flowing, no one's going to risk tearing it all down."

Guzzle snorted, tearing off another piece of bread and stuffing it into his mouth. "The cockroaches, the dogs, the other farms—they all rely on us, don't they?"

Sludge's smile widened. "Exactly," he said. "And as long as we control the bread, we control everything."

The sun hung low in the sky as the day dragged on, casting long, thin shadows across the farmyard. The air was growing colder, a biting wind slipping through the cracks in the barn and sending shivers through the animals as they worked. Near the bread mill, Victor and Ash moved quietly, the weight of the day's labor heavy on their shoulders. But Victor's mind wasn't just on the work in front of him—it was on the conversations he had been hearing lately, the whispers, the doubts, the growing discontent.

He knew that Ash shared his thoughts, but others, it seemed, still clung to the pigs' promises, refusing to believe that their hard work would never be rewarded. He couldn't understand how, after all these years, some of the animals still believed in the system that kept them hungry and tired.

As he stacked loaves of bread onto a wooden tray, Victor noticed a sheep working nearby, his wool matted and thin, barely enough to cover his shivering frame. His name was Gale, and he had been on the farm as long as Victor could remember. But unlike many of the other animals, Gale remained loyal to the pigs, convinced that if he worked just a little harder, things would change.

Victor watched him for a moment, noting how Gale's frail body trembled in the cold. His wool had been sheared so thin by the pigs, and the promise of warmth or comfort seemed as distant for him as it did for the cockroaches. The sight of Gale's trembling body filled Victor with frustration. How could someone who had given so much, received so little, and suffered so obviously, still believe that things would ever change under the pigs' rule?

Taking a deep breath, Victor stepped closer to Gale, hoping to plant a seed of doubt—something that might shake the sheep's faith in the pigs. "Gale," Victor said softly, careful to keep his voice low. "Can we talk for a minute?"

Gale glanced up, his face weary and lined with fatigue, but he offered a weak smile. "Of course, Victor. What's on your mind?"

Victor hesitated for a moment, then pressed on. "You've been here as long as I have," he began, trying to choose his words carefully. "You've seen how things work on this farm—the pigs take everything, and we're left with just enough to survive. It's never going to change, Gale. No matter how hard we work, we'll always be hungry while they feast."

Gale's smile faded, his expression tightening. He shifted his weight uncomfortably, the thin wool on his body doing little to protect him from the cold wind that blew through the mill. His legs shook as he tried to keep himself steady, but he remained silent for a moment, as if considering Victor's words.

"I don't know, Victor," Gale said finally, his voice soft but strained. "The pigs have always said that if we keep working hard, things will get better. They've been fair before… maybe things are hard now, but if we push through, maybe they'll change."

Victor's heart sank. He had heard these words before, from so many others. The pigs' promises had been repeated so often, they had become ingrained in the animals' minds, a cruel mantra that kept them working without hope of reward. But it wasn't just the words—it was the look in Gale's eyes, the desperate, almost pleading belief that things could improve. It was the same hope Victor had clung to, once. But that hope had long since faded.

"Gale," Victor said, his voice more urgent now, "we've been doing this for years. We give them everything, and they give us nothing. You've seen it. The pigs live in luxury while we freeze out here. You're shaking, for crying out loud! Look at yourself—you've worked harder than anyone, and yet here you are, still cold, still hungry. Don't you see? They're never going to give us what we deserve."

Gale wrapped his arms around himself, his body trembling visibly now. The cold was biting, and his thin wool offered little protection. Still, he shook his head slowly, refusing to meet Victor's eyes. "It's not that simple," he murmured, his voice shaky. "If we stop working, what will we have? If we give up now, we might lose everything. And maybe... maybe if we just keep going, if we work a little harder, things will change. The pigs said it themselves—there's an election coming. Maybe things will be different this time."

Victor felt a wave of frustration wash over him. How could Gale still believe in the pigs after all this time? How could he not see the truth staring him in the face?

"The election’s just another lie, Gale," Victor said, his voice growing harsher than he intended. "They say it to keep us going, to make us think we have a choice, but we don’t. Nothing will change unless we make it change."

Gale’s face tightened, his eyes flashing with something like fear. "And what do you suggest we do, Victor?" he asked, his voice rising slightly. "What do we do? Stop working? Starve? Fight the pigs and their dogs? You think that’s going to end well for any of us?"

Victor opened his mouth to respond, but the words caught in his throat. He had no answer. Not really. He knew that rebellion was dangerous, that standing up to the pigs could cost them everything. But he also knew that continuing to work in this broken system would keep them trapped forever.

"I don’t know," Victor admitted, his voice quieting again. "But I know this can’t go on forever. Something has to change, Gale. We can’t keep living like this—cold, hungry, always working for crumbs while they take everything."

Gale looked at him for a long moment, his eyes filled with a deep, painful uncertainty. "Maybe," he said softly. "Maybe you’re right. But I can’t risk it, Victor. I can’t stop working. If I stop, I lose everything, and I can’t take that chance. If we just keep going… maybe things will get better."

Victor watched as Gale turned away, shivering against the cold as he moved back to his work. The conversation had failed. No matter how much Victor tried to make him see the truth, Gale was too deeply entrenched in the pigs’ lies, too afraid to let go of the only thing he had—his work, his fragile hope.

Victor stood there for a moment, staring after him, feeling the weight of the failure press down on him. Not everyone was ready to see the truth. Not yet.

The cold wind whipped through the farm, tugging at the thin skin of the workers and stirring up dust in the empty spaces between the barns and fields. The air was sharp, biting at the animals as they went about their tasks, and though the bread mill was filled with the familiar scent of baking loaves, there was no warmth in it. The tension on the farm was growing, not just in whispers and conversations, but in the very atmosphere itself.

Ash moved through the mill, her eyes sharp and alert. She had been talking to more of the cockroaches lately, sensing that the undercurrent of dissatisfaction was gaining momentum. She wasn’t alone in her doubts anymore. More and more, she noticed the animals looking tired—not just from the endless work, but from the false hope they had clung to for so long.

But something else was happening, too. Not all the animals were ready to give up on the pigs' promises. There was a divide forming—a dangerous, widening gap between those who still believed that the pigs would eventually deliver on their promises and those, like Ash, who had come to realize that nothing would ever change unless they made it change.

It started with hushed conversations in the dark corners of the barn. Some of the younger cockroaches, eager but worn thin from hunger, gathered around Ash, asking her questions, sharing their frustrations.

"They say the election will fix things," one young cockroach said, her voice tinged with doubt. "But what if it's just another trick?"

Ash didn't hesitate. "It is," she replied firmly, her voice steady. "The pigs have been lying to us for years. The election is just a distraction, a way to keep us working. They want us to believe we have a say in how things are run, but the truth is, nothing will change unless we make it change."

The group around her nodded, their eyes filled with a mix of anger and hope. They were tired of waiting, tired of being lied to, and Ash was becoming the voice that articulated what they were all starting to feel.

But not everyone agreed.

In the far corner of the mill, near the ovens, another group had gathered. These animals still clung to the pigs' promises, believing that the system, flawed though it was, was the only way forward. They watched Ash and her growing influence with a mixture of skepticism and resentment.

One of the older cockroaches, Bran, stood with his arms crossed, listening to Ash's words from a distance. He had been on the farm longer than most and had always believed that hard work would eventually lead to reward. He had seen the pigs' speeches, heard their promises, and even now, he wasn't willing to give up on the idea that things would get better.

"She's just stirring up trouble," Bran muttered to the group around him, his voice low but filled with irritation. "All this talk of rebellion, of taking things into our own hands—it's dangerous. The pigs are trying. They've kept us alive this long, haven't they?"

Another cockroach beside him nodded. "If we keep working, if we show loyalty, the pigs will have no choice but to give us more. They can't run the farm without us, and they know it."

Bran grunted in agreement. "Exactly. They've promised change. We just have to be patient. This election could be the turning point."

The divide was becoming clearer by the day. On one side, those like Bran, who still believed in the system and in the pigs' promises. They were the ones who feared change, who clung to the belief that their hard work would eventually pay off if they just remained loyal and patient. On the other side were those like Ash, who had grown tired of waiting, tired of giving everything while receiving nothing in return. And with each passing day, Ash found herself at the center of the conversations about what needed to happen next.

Later that day, Ash found herself talking to a small group of sheep and chickens, their tired faces reflecting the same frustration she had seen in the other cockroaches. One of the sheep, Lila, a quiet but determined worker, spoke up.

"Do you really think we can change things?" Lila asked, her voice soft but hopeful. "I want to believe it, but what if the pigs retaliate? What if they send the dogs after us?"

Ash looked at her, her gaze steady. "I know it's dangerous," she admitted, her voice low but filled with conviction. "But we've tried doing things their way for years, and look where it's

gotten us. We're still hungry, still cold, still working day and night for crumbs. The pigs will never give us more unless we take it for ourselves."

A nervous murmur rippled through the group, but Ash pressed on. "We're the ones making the bread," she continued. "We're the ones doing the work. Without us, they have nothing. It's time we stop waiting for them to change and start thinking about how we can take control."

One of the chickens, Pip, who had always been too afraid to speak up before, raised her head. "But what if we fail?" she asked, her voice shaking. "What if we stand up to them, and they crush us?"

Ash met her eyes, her own heart pounding with the weight of the risks. She knew the dangers—they all did. But she also knew that staying silent, staying passive, was no longer an option. "If we do nothing, nothing will ever change," she said quietly. "But if we stand together, if we refuse to let them control us anymore, maybe—just maybe—we can make things better for all of us."

As the conversation continued, Ash could feel the shift happening. The divide between those who believed in the pigs and those who didn't was growing wider, and she was finding herself more and more at the center of the push for change. The tension on the farm was building, and it was only a matter of time before something snapped.

But as Ash looked around at the faces of the animals gathered around her, she saw something else, too. Not just fear, not just doubt—but hope. A fragile, flickering hope that maybe, just maybe, they could change their fate.

The farmyard was unusually still as the pigs gathered on the platform at the top of the hill, their grand barn looming behind them. The animals, called to assemble by the pigs' loud and commanding voices, slowly gathered below. The bread mill had gone quiet, and the fields lay untouched as all eyes turned toward Sludge, Guzzle, and the other pigs standing proudly above them.

Ash stood near the back, her arms crossed as she watched the pigs, her heart heavy with suspicion. She had heard whispers about the pigs making another announcement, but whatever it was, she had already decided not to trust it. She could feel the tension in the air, thick and electric, as the animals waited for the pigs to speak.

Sludge stepped forward, his large body casting a long shadow over the crowd. His expression was one of calm authority, and when he began to speak, his voice was smooth and confident, as though he already knew the animals would believe every word.

"My friends," Sludge began, spreading his arms wide as if to embrace the entire crowd. "We stand at a turning point in the history of our farm. I know that times have been hard. I know you have worked tirelessly, and I have heard your concerns. That is why today, I am proud to announce that real change is coming."

The crowd stirred, and a murmur spread through the animals. Ash glanced around, noting the flickers of hope in some of their eyes—especially the younger ones, who had not yet been

through as many empty promises as she had. Beside her, Victor shifted uneasily, watching Sludge with wary eyes.

"For too long," Sludge continued, "you have worked without seeing the rewards you deserve. But I want you to know that we are listening. The time has come for a new chapter, a new way forward for all of us. That is why I am announcing a farm-wide election—an election that will allow you, the workers, to have a voice in how this farm is run."

The murmur of the crowd grew louder, some of the animals exchanging excited glances. Ash could see it in their faces—the spark of hope that had been buried under layers of exhaustion and doubt. The promise of an election, of having a say in how the farm was managed, was enough to make some of them believe, even if only for a moment, that things might actually change.

Sludge pressed on, his voice growing stronger with each word. "This election will give you the opportunity to choose one of the many pigs to lead and to represent your interests, to hear your voices. This election is the change you've all been waiting for.

The farm buzzed with a strange new energy, a kind that hadn't been felt in years. Ever since the pigs announced the upcoming election, the usual dreary atmosphere of the fields and bread mill had shifted. The animals, tired and worn as they were, now seemed to move with a little more spring in their step. Conversations that had once been filled with complaints of hunger and exhaustion were now laced with excitement, the promise of change stirring something long dormant in them—hope.

For the first time in a long while, many cockroaches weren't just going through the motions. As they worked, their whispers echoed through the mill, each one filled with cautious optimism about the future. This election was being sold as their chance—a moment for the animals to have a say, to choose a leader who would finally see their suffering and do something about it. Maybe, just maybe, this time things would be different.

Victor could feel that hope growing inside him, too. As he worked beside Ash, he found himself glancing over at her every few minutes, his mind buzzing with thoughts of what could be. They had both been through so much—days of backbreaking labor, endless promises of bread that never came, always on the edge of survival. But this election felt like a real opportunity, a turning point for the animals on the farm.

"This is our chance, Ash," Victor said, his voice filled with an excitement he hadn't felt in ages. "The pigs promised we'd get a bigger share of the bread. We just have to vote wisely, pick the right leader. This time, it could actually happen."

Ash glanced at him, her expression cautious, her hands still moving as she kneaded the dough. "You really believe that, Victor?" she asked, her voice tinged with doubt. "You think picking one of them is going to make a difference?"

Victor nodded, his eyes bright. "I do. I know it sounds crazy, but maybe they really mean it this time. If enough of us vote for the right pig, they'll have to follow through on their promises. They can't keep the bread from us forever."

Ash paused, her hands resting on the dough as she considered his words. Deep down, she wanted to believe it, too. She wanted to think that maybe, after all these years of suffering, things could finally change. But the cynicism that had grown inside her over the years kept tugging at her mind, warning her not to fall for it again.

"They've promised us things before, Victor," she said softly, her eyes fixed on the bread in front of her. "Every year they say the same things—work harder, and you'll get more. And every year, we end up with the same crumbs."

Victor shook his head, unwilling to let go of his newfound hope. "But this time is different, Ash. This time we get to choose. Don't you see? We'll have a say in who leads us. If we choose the right pig, someone who actually listens to us, they'll have to make things better. They'll have to give us more."

Ash looked at him, her face softening as she saw the earnestness in his eyes. Victor was always the hopeful one, always trying to see the best in situations where there seemed to be none. She didn't want to crush that hope, especially when part of her, buried deep down, wanted to believe it, too.

"Maybe," Ash said at last, her voice hesitant. "Maybe it could be different this time."

The flicker of doubt still lingered in her mind, but she could feel it weakening, if only slightly. The promise of the election had spread like wildfire across the farm, and even she, the one who had always seen through the pigs' lies, felt the pull of hope tugging at her.

As they worked, the conversations around them grew louder, filled with excitement and nervous energy. The animals talked about which pig they would vote for, who might actually care about their struggles, who might finally give them a bigger share of the bread. The election had sparked something powerful in them—a belief that they weren't powerless after all.

But as Ash continued to knead the dough, her hands moving automatically, her mind kept returning to the same question: What if it's just another lie?

She didn't say it out loud, not yet. Not when everyone else seemed so eager to believe. But the doubt sat in her chest, heavy and unshakable. And yet, despite herself, she couldn't help but wonder, What if?

The farmyard was alive with noise and color as the pigs officially launched their campaigns. For the first time in seasons, the pigs themselves descended from their hilltop barn, standing among the animals, their voices booming through the fields as bread banners waved in the wind. The election was no longer a distant promise—it was happening, and it had taken over the farm like a storm.

Ash and Victor stood near the back of the crowd, watching as the pigs strutted across a makeshift stage. The farmyard had been transformed, with banners proclaiming slogans like, "Bread for the Workers!" and "A Fair Share for All!" waving high above the animals' heads. Loudspeakers, crudely fashioned from old farm tools, echoed with the booming voices of the pigs as they took turns making grand promises.

At the center of it all were Sludge and Guzzle, the two main candidates for leadership, each determined to win over the animals with their words. The pigs had spared no effort in making their campaigns look as if real change was on the horizon, even though Ash knew deep down it was all just another illusion.

Sludge stepped forward first, his massive form towering over the animals gathered below. His voice, loud and commanding, carried easily across the yard. "My fellow workers," he began, his tone smooth and reassuring, "I know that times have been hard. I know that you have worked day and night, and I see your sacrifices. But that's why I am here—to offer you the change you've been waiting for."

The crowd stirred, whispers of excitement rippling through the animals as they listened to him speak. Even Ash could feel the pull of his words, though she forced herself to stay skeptical. She had seen this before—the grand promises, the speeches filled with hope. But it was all too familiar, and she wasn't going to be fooled again.

"A vote for me is a vote for prosperity!" Sludge bellowed, raising his hoof high in the air. "I will ensure that those of you who work the hardest will receive the bread you deserve. No longer will you toil for crumbs. I will make sure that everyone who contributes to the farm will benefit from its success!"

A wave of cheering erupted from the crowd. The cockroaches, the sheep, and even the chickens, who had long been silent under the weight of their labor, raised their voices in support. The promise of more bread, of finally being recognized for their hard work, was enough to make them believe. For a moment, it seemed as if Sludge's words could actually be true—that maybe, this time, things would be different.

Beside Sludge, Guzzle stepped forward to deliver his own speech, not wanting to be outdone. His smaller frame moved quickly across the stage, his voice filled with the same enthusiasm. "My friends," Guzzle began, "we all know that this farm is built on the backs of the workers—on your backs. And that is why I am here today: to ensure that your work is rewarded. Under my leadership, we will distribute more bread, and we will make sure that those who contribute the most receive the most."

The crowd roared in response, their excitement building with every word. Ash could see the effect it was having on them—the way their eyes lit up, the way their shoulders seemed to lift a little higher. The idea that they might finally get their fair share was intoxicating, and it was clear that the pigs' promises were taking hold.

Beside her, Victor couldn't help but get swept up in the energy of the moment. "Do you hear that, Ash?" he said, his voice filled with cautious optimism. "They're promising real change. If we vote for the right pig, maybe things really will get better. Maybe this election isn't just a trick."

Ash watched the stage, her jaw clenched. She wanted to believe him. She wanted to believe that this election could bring the change the farm so desperately needed. But the skepticism inside her remained strong, a quiet voice reminding her that the pigs had always promised more, yet delivered almost nothing.

"I don’t know," she said slowly, her eyes never leaving Sludge as he raised his hoof triumphantly, basking in the cheers of the crowd. "They’re saying all the right things, but it feels too good to be true. They’ve made promises before, and look where we are. Why would they change now?"

Victor was quiet for a moment, his eyes filled with uncertainty. "I don’t know," he admitted softly. "But if we don’t give them a chance, what else do we have? We’ve got to hope for something, right?"

Ash sighed, glancing around at the excited faces of the animals, many of whom were eagerly discussing which pig to vote for. The farmyard had become a sea of raised voices, hope blossoming in even the most worn-down workers. But beneath it all, Ash couldn’t shake the feeling that it was all a performance—that the pigs were giving them just enough hope to keep them working, to keep the system intact.

At the edges of the crowd, the dogs stood watch. Rex and Buster, the pigs’ loyal enforcers, circled the gathering, their eyes sharp and alert. They didn’t speak, but their presence was a reminder that dissent would not be tolerated. Anyone who dared to question the election, who dared to say that it was all just another trick, would be met with swift punishment. The pigs might have been talking about change, but the dogs ensured that control remained firmly in their grasp.

As the rally continued, with more speeches and promises from both Sludge and Guzzle, Ash felt the weight of the decision pressing down on her. She could see the divide forming even more clearly now—between those who still believed in the system and those who, like her, were beginning to see through the illusion. But no matter how much she wanted to resist, she knew that the pigs had already won this round. The animals were buying into the promise of change, and for now, that was all the pigs needed.

The atmosphere on the farm had shifted even more since the pigs’ campaign speeches. The energy that had rippled through the crowd during the rallies now spread across the entire farm. Everywhere Ash went, she could hear the animals talking about the election, their voices filled with a mixture of excitement and anticipation. For many, the promise of change had become something tangible, something real. But for Ash, doubt still gnawed at the back of her mind.

The farm was no longer united in its struggles. A divide had formed, a deep rift between those who believed the election was the answer to their suffering and those who, like Ash, remained wary. The pigs had done their work well, spreading rumors that the old ways of running the farm were being dismantled, that the election would bring about a new era of fairness and equality. For the animals who had grown tired of waiting, it was exactly what they needed to hear.

Ash worked quietly beside Victor in the bread mill, listening as he spoke, his voice filled with a new kind of enthusiasm. "This election is different, Ash," Victor said, his hands moving quickly as he shaped a loaf of dough energetically. "The pigs know we’re fed up. They know they can’t keep things the way they’ve been. If they don’t change, they’ll lose control. They have no choice but to listen to us now."

Ash didn’t respond immediately, focusing on the dough in front of her. She could hear the hope in Victor’s voice, the same hope that had spread to so many of the other animals on the farm. And part of her wanted to believe him. After all, hadn’t the pigs promised that the election would give them a voice? That it would bring real change?

But the more she thought about it, the more the doubt grew. The pigs had always been clever, always one step ahead of the animals. Ash couldn’t shake the feeling that this election was just another way to maintain control, to keep the animals working without truly changing anything.

"What if they don’t change, Victor?" Ash said quietly, her voice barely audible over the sound of the ovens. "What if they just say they’ll give us more, but things stay the same? You really think they’re going to give up their bread, their power?"

Victor frowned, his hands pausing for a moment as he considered her words. "They’ll have to," he said, though there was a slight edge of uncertainty in his voice. "The animals won’t stand for it anymore. The pigs know that if they don’t follow through, they’ll lose everything. The system is changing, Ash. They can’t keep living like they have been while we suffer."

Ash bit her lip, her mind turning over his words. It wasn’t that she didn’t want to believe him—she did. But she had seen how the pigs operated, how they always managed to keep the animals in line with just enough hope to prevent rebellion. The pigs had built their power on lies and manipulation, and she couldn’t imagine them giving that up so easily.

"Maybe," Ash said after a long pause, "but why would they give up everything they have? They live in luxury while we’re barely getting by. Why would they share their bread with us when they’ve never done it before?"

Victor sighed, his frustration growing. "Because they have to," he insisted, his voice rising slightly. "The animals aren’t stupid, Ash. We know what’s at stake. If the pigs don’t change things, if they don’t give us more, the whole farm will collapse. They need us, and now they’re finally seeing that."

Ash wasn’t so sure. The pigs had always needed the animals—they were the ones who made the bread, who kept the farm running. But needing them hadn’t stopped the pigs from exploiting them, from taking more than their share and leaving the workers with scraps. The idea that the pigs would suddenly start acting in the other animals’ best interest felt… unlikely.

"I hope you’re right," Ash said softly, though her voice lacked conviction. "But I can’t shake the feeling that we’re walking into another trap. The pigs have lied before. Why should this time be any different?"

Victor shook his head, his determination unwavering. "Because this time, they know we’re fed up," he repeated. "They know we won’t keep working for nothing. If they don’t change, they’ll lose control, and they know that. This is our chance, Ash. We just have to vote wisely, and things will get better."

The farm, meanwhile, was a living representation of the growing divide. Conversations about the election dominated every corner of the yard, from the bread mill to the fields. The sheep,

the goats, cows and the chickens—all of them talked endlessly about which pig to vote for, which promises felt the most genuine, which candidate seemed most likely to redistribute the bread more fairly.

Ash could see it in their eyes—the hope that had taken root, the belief that this election was their opportunity to fix what had been broken for so long. But as she looked around, she also noticed something else: the quiet hesitation in some of the older animals, the ones who had seen the pigs' tricks before. They didn't speak out, but their silence was telling. They, too, were waiting to see if this election would bring real change or if it would only deepen the control the pigs had over the farm.

Through it all, the pigs continued to spread their carefully crafted messages, hinting that the old ways were being dismantled, that the farm was entering a new era of fairness and equality. They were careful, too, never to promise too much, always leaving just enough ambiguity in their words to cover themselves if things didn't improve.

And yet, for many of the animals, that didn't matter. The idea that the pigs would have to change, that they would be forced to give up their luxurious lifestyle in exchange for the farm's survival, was enough to make them believe.

But not Ash. She listened to the excitement around her, she heard Victor's hopeful words, but her suspicions lingered. The pigs were too comfortable in their power, too comfortable with the bread they hoarded and the control they exerted over the farm. As much as she wanted to believe in the promise of the election, Ash couldn't help but wonder if the pigs had any intention of changing at all.

As the farm buzzed with excitement over the upcoming election, there was one figure who remained untouched by the frenzy: Bray, the donkey. He watched the growing enthusiasm from his usual spot near the edge of the barn, where he quietly went about his business. Unlike the pigs, who paraded around the farm with grand speeches and promises, or the animals, who buzzed with excitement and anticipation, Bray was calm, silent, as if nothing had changed at all.

He still lent out bread to those who came to him, his tall, silent form ever present in the background. But unlike before, when he would remind the cockroaches of their debt, subtly hinting at how much more they owed, Bray now said nothing. It was as if the coming election had rendered him mute, his usual cold, calculating demeanor softened by the storm of hope sweeping through the farm.

For the cockroaches, this silence spoke volumes. They took it as a sign that even Bray, the one who always kept the books, who always reminded them of their debts, believed that things would change after the election. Some even whispered that perhaps Bray knew something they didn't—that the pigs had promised him a new role, or that the bread he controlled would soon be redistributed more fairly.

But Ash wasn't convinced. She had noticed Bray's silence, too, but instead of finding it comforting, it made her uneasy. Bray wasn't one to be silent without reason, and she suspected that whatever he wasn't saying carried more weight than any of the pigs' speeches.

Later that afternoon, as the sun began to sink low over the farm, casting long shadows across the fields, Ash found herself near Bray's usual spot. She hesitated for a moment, watching him as he stood beside a small pile of bread, calmly chewing on a stale crust. His eyes were distant, almost detached, as if he were watching the farm unfold from a place far removed from its day-to-day struggles.

Unable to ignore her curiosity any longer, Ash approached him. "Bray," she called softly.

The donkey turned his head slowly, his deep eyes locking onto hers, but he said nothing.

Ash stepped closer, her hands clasped in front of her. "You've been quiet lately," she said, her voice low but steady. "You're still lending bread, but you haven't said anything about the debts. What do you think of all this? The election… do you really think things will change?"

Bray remained silent for a moment, his gaze unreadable. Then, with a slow, deliberate motion, he shrugged. "The bread will always return to its rightful place," he said simply, his voice calm and detached, as if the words carried no more weight than a casual observation about the weather.

Ash frowned, her frustration rising. "What does that mean?" she asked, her voice sharper now. "The pigs are promising more bread for everyone. They're saying the system is going to change. Don't you think… don't you think that maybe this time things will be different?"

Bray's expression didn't change. He looked at her with the same calm, indifferent gaze he had always carried, as if none of this—none of the excitement, the promises, the hopes of the animals—affected him in the slightest. "The bread always returns to its rightful place," he repeated, his voice slow and measured. "No matter who leads, no matter what they promise, the bread will always find its way back to those who control it."

Ash's heart sank as she heard his words. She had hoped, if only for a moment, that Bray's silence meant he believed in the possibility of change. But instead, his words only confirmed what she had feared—that even in the midst of all the excitement, nothing was truly going to change.

"So you don't believe the pigs' promises, then," she said quietly, her voice filled with resignation.

Bray didn't answer right away. He simply looked out across the farm, his gaze drifting toward the bread mill where the animals continued to work, unaware of the conversation happening in the shadows. "Promises are words," he said finally. "Bread is power. The pigs know that. And so do I."

Ash felt a wave of frustration wash over her. She had wanted to find some sense of hope, some sign that maybe, just maybe, the election would bring the change the animals needed. But Bray's words had stripped away that hope, leaving behind only the cold, hard truth.

"Then why do you keep lending bread?" Ash asked, her voice sharp. "If nothing's going to change, why bother?"

Bray turned his head back to her, his expression as unreadable as ever. "Because," he said slowly, "the farm still runs on bread. As long as there's work to be done, there will always be those who need more than they have. And as long as that's true, they'll come to me. The pigs might promise change, but the system stays the same. The bread keeps moving, and I keep lending."

Ash stared at him, feeling the weight of his words settle over her. She knew he was right. The pigs could hold their election, they could make their promises, but as long as Bray controlled the bread, and as long as the pigs remained in power, the cycle would continue.

"What about the rest of us?" Ash asked, her voice soft but determined. "What about those of us who want things to change?"

Bray tilted his head slightly, his eyes narrowing as he considered her question. "Then you'll have to decide what's more important," he said quietly. "The promises of pigs, or the reality of bread. But don't expect the system to change just because you want it to. Bread doesn't care about elections."

With that, Bray turned away, returning to his silent vigil over the farm. Ash stood there for a moment, watching him, feeling the cold truth of his words settle deep in her chest. The election might promise change, but Bray had shown her the deeper truth—the bread would always return to its rightful place.

The sun rose over the farm, casting a warm, golden light across the fields. The air was filled with anticipation as the animals gathered in the yard for what had been promised as a historic day—the day of the election. The promise of change hung in the air, and the excitement was palpable. Even the usually quiet corners of the farm buzzed with conversation, animals of all kinds whispering to one another about who they would vote for, and what they hoped might come from it.

Ash and Victor stood near the center of the crowd, surrounded by cockroaches, sheep, chickens, cows and goats, all talking eagerly about the future. Banners fluttered in the gentle breeze, and for the first time in what felt like years, there was a real sense of hope among the workers. This, they believed, was their chance to finally have a say—to finally make their voices heard.

Up on the platform, Sludge and Guzzle stood side by side, each one wearing a broad smile. They shook hooves, wings, and claws with the animals as they came forward to cast their votes, their faces filled with the practiced warmth of politicians who knew how to play to a crowd. Sludge, large and commanding, greeted each animal with a firm handshake, while Guzzle, smaller and quicker, darted between them, offering promises of a better tomorrow.

"Cast your vote wisely!" Sludge called out, his deep voice booming across the farmyard. "Your future is in your hands today! Together, we will build a farm where hard work is rewarded, and bread is shared more fairly!"

The animals cheered as they lined up to vote, their faces filled with hope. The system, it seemed, was finally changing. The pigs had told them that this election would be different—that it would give them a voice. And today, as they cast their votes, they believed it.

Victor turned to Ash, his face glowing with optimism. "This is it, Ash," he said, his voice filled with excitement. "Sludge's going to win. I know it. And when he does, things will get better. You'll see."

Ash watched the crowd, her arms crossed, her face betraying little emotion. She had heard Sludge's promises, and she had seen the excitement in the animals' eyes, but the doubt in her heart remained. She had lived through too many broken promises to believe that one election could change the way things worked on the farm.

"I hope you're right," she said softly, though her voice carried the weight of her skepticism. "But we've heard these promises before, Victor. I'm not sure anything's going to change."

Victor shook his head, refusing to let go of his hope. "Sludge has to follow through this time. He knows we won't keep working if he doesn't."

The line of animals voting seemed endless, but finally, as the sun began to dip lower in the sky, the last vote was cast. The farmyard fell into a hush as the pigs gathered on the platform, preparing to announce the results. The air was thick with anticipation, the animals standing shoulder to shoulder, waiting to hear who would lead them into this new era.

Guzzle stood nervously beside Sludge, his small eyes darting around the crowd. He knew what was coming, but he kept up the facade of competition. Sludge, however, looked as confident as ever, his massive form towering over the animals, his face glowing with the certainty of his victory.

Finally, one of the pigs—an assistant to Sludge—stepped forward with a piece of paper in hand. "The votes have been counted," he announced, his voice loud and clear. "And the winner, by a landslide, is…"

There was a brief pause, the tension building as the animals held their breath.

"Sludge!"

The crowd erupted into cheers, a wave of excitement crashing over the farm as the animals celebrated Sludge's victory. Victor threw his arms around Ash, his face beaming with joy. "We did it, Ash! We chose him! Things are going to get better now, you'll see!"

Ash smiled weakly, but the flicker of doubt remained in her chest, even as the animals cheered around her. She watched as Sludge stepped forward, basking in the adulation of the crowd, his wide smile growing even broader.

"My fellow workers," Sludge began, raising his hoof to quiet the crowd. "Today, you have spoken. Today, you have chosen me to lead this farm into a new era. As he spoke, a loud, wet sound cut through the air, and from behind Sludge, a burst of dung erupted from his backside, splattering the platform with a mess. And I promise you—starting tomorrow, bread will be more fairly distributed. Those of you who work the hardest will receive what you deserve!".

The animals cheered even louder, their voices echoing across the fields. Sludge continued, his speech growing grander with every word.

Sludge didn't miss a beat. He smiled through it all, his voice unwavering, as though nothing had happened.

"This is the dawn of a new day for the farm!" Sludge bellowed, his voice rising. "Starting tomorrow, you will see the fruits of your labor, and bread will be shared as it should be!"

The animals, despite the strange sight before them, resumed their cheering, their hope undiminished by the embarrassing display. Sludge had won, and in their eyes, that meant real change was coming.

Ash watched the scene unfold, a pit forming in her stomach. The animals cheered for Sludge, their faces filled with hope, but all Ash could see was the same old cycle repeating itself—grand promises, loud speeches, and a mess hidden behind it all. She wanted to believe that things would be different, but as Sludge smiled and waved to the crowd, she couldn't shake the feeling that tomorrow would be just like today, and the bread would continue to flow into the pigs' hooves.

Ignition

The sun rose slowly over the farm, casting its soft light over the fields and bread mill. The air was crisp with the cool morning breeze, but there was a noticeable shift in the atmosphere—an electric undercurrent of expectation. It was the day after the election, and the animals awoke with a sense of hope they hadn't felt in years. Today, they believed, would be the day that everything changed.

In the bread mill, the cockroaches gathered early, their usual tired faces replaced with excitement. The hum of conversation filled the space as they eagerly began their work, kneading the dough, preparing the ovens, and loading the loaves for the pigs. For the first time in as long as they could remember, they weren't simply going through the motions. There was a real belief that today would be different, that the promises made by Sludge would finally be fulfilled.

Victor was especially enthusiastic. His hands moved quickly as he worked, his face bright with optimism. "Today's the day, Ash," he said, glancing over at her with a grin. "We'll get more bread. I know it."

Ash stood beside him, her movements slower, more deliberate. She could feel the excitement radiating from the others, but the doubt that had taken root inside her remained. She had heard Sludge's promises, seen the way the animals had cheered for him, but part of her still couldn't believe that the pigs would actually follow through.

"What makes you so sure, Victor?" she asked quietly, her voice barely rising above the noise of the mill.

Victor didn’t hesitate. "He promised us, didn’t he?" he said, his voice filled with conviction. "He said that those of us who work the hardest would get more. And look at us—we’ve been working for years. We deserve it. And today, Ash, we’re going to get it."

Ash remained silent, her hands continuing to knead the dough in front of her. She wanted to believe Victor, to share in the hope that had spread across the farm, but something inside her refused to let go of the nagging suspicion that nothing had really changed. The pigs had always promised more, but they had never delivered. Why would today be any different?

As the day wore on, the cockroaches worked harder than ever, their anticipation growing with each passing hour. Every time one of the pigs appeared in the yard, they looked up eagerly, waiting for some sign that the promised changes were coming. But each time, the pigs simply watched from afar, their eyes scanning the workers without a word.

Victor kept his enthusiasm high, talking to anyone who would listen about how the bread would be distributed more fairly, how they would all finally get what they deserved. "Just wait," he said to a small group of cockroaches gathered near the ovens. "When the bread is ready today, we’ll get our share. You’ll see."

But as the hours passed, Ash’s silence grew heavier. She watched the pigs, their expressions calm, almost indifferent, as they strolled around the farm, inspecting the work without addressing the animals directly. The excitement that had filled the air in the morning was beginning to fray at the edges, the first hints of doubt creeping into the conversations around her.

Finally, as the afternoon sun began to sink lower in the sky, the bread was finished. The cockroaches stood in a nervous huddle near the mill, their eyes fixed on the large pile of loaves, waiting for Sludge or one of the other pigs to come forward and make good on their promises.

But when Sludge did appear, flanked by the ever-present dogs, his face showed no sign of the grand change the animals had been waiting for. He surveyed the bread with his usual smug expression, nodding to himself as if everything were as it should be.

Victor leaned toward Ash, his voice barely containing his excitement. "This is it, Ash. He’s going to make the announcement. We’re finally going to get more."

But when Sludge spoke, his words were nothing like what they had been hoping for. "Excellent work, as always," he said in his deep, booming voice. "The farm continues to thrive because of your efforts." He turned to the dogs and gave a slight nod. "Distribute the bread as usual."

The crowd of cockroaches fell into stunned silence. As usual? The words hit them like a blow. There was no mention of more bread, no acknowledgment of the promises made the day before. It was as if the election had never happened.

Victor blinked in disbelief, his face falling as the realization set in. "Wait," he muttered, his voice shaky. "What about… what about the extra bread?"

But Sludge had already turned away, his business with the animals apparently finished. The dogs, as they always did, began to collect the bread, leaving only the usual crumbs for the workers. The cockroaches stared in shock, their hopes crumbling as quickly as the bread in their hands.

Ash stood beside Victor, her heart heavy as she watched the scene unfold. She had wanted to be wrong. She had wanted to believe that Sludge would follow through, that the election had meant something. But now, as she watched the pigs retreat back to their luxurious barns, it was clear that nothing had changed.

Victor shook his head, his face pale with disappointment. "I don't understand," he whispered, his voice hollow. "He promised… he promised us…"

Ash placed a hand on his shoulder, her voice soft but filled with the hard truth. "This is how it's always been," she said. "They make promises to keep us working, but they never give us more. It's all just a game to them."

Victor looked at her, his eyes filled with hurt and confusion. "But why would they lie?" he asked, his voice breaking.

Ash sighed, her gaze turning toward the pigs disappearing into the distance. "Because they can," she said simply. "As long as we believe their promises, they don't have to change a thing."

The cockroaches stood there for a long time, the weight of the truth settling over them like a dark cloud. The election had been nothing more than another empty promise, another way to keep them working without asking too many questions.

And for Ash, it was a confirmation of what she had suspected all along: the pigs would never change, not unless they were forced to.

The sun sank lower in the sky, casting long shadows over the farm, but the mood among the animals had darkened even more than the fading light. As the hours passed, the initial excitement from the morning had dissolved, leaving behind an uncomfortable silence. The cockroaches had returned to their usual work, but the sense of anticipation that had filled the air was gone. One by one, they began to realize what Ash had suspected all along: nothing had changed.

The promise of more bread, the grand speeches from Sludge and Guzzle, the election that was supposed to bring a new era—it had all been a farce. The cockroaches still received only the meager crumbs that barely kept them alive, while the pigs continued to hoard the bulk of the bread, just as they always had.

Victor's face was tight with frustration as he stood near the ovens, watching the pigs from a distance. He had been one of the most hopeful, one of the loudest voices pushing for the election, convinced that it would finally bring the change they all needed. Now, as he looked down at the small pile of crumbs in his hands, the disappointment was almost too much to bear.

"This isn’t right," he muttered under his breath, clenching his fists. "They said things would be different."

The murmurs of the other cockroaches echoed his sentiments. As they worked, they whispered to one another, their voices low but filled with bitterness. "They lied to us," one of them said. "It’s the same as before. We’re no better off."

Another cockroach shook his head in frustration. "I thought we’d get more. Why did we believe them?"

Ash listened to the quiet conversations, feeling the weight of the betrayal settling over the workers like a heavy fog. The promises had been so enticing, the hope so strong, but now it was clear that the pigs had never intended to keep their word. The election had been nothing more than a way to keep the animals in line, to stop them from questioning the system for just a little longer.

Victor, unable to contain his frustration any longer, stormed across the yard toward one of the pig enforcers who stood near the bread pile. The enforcer, a stout pig named Grunt, was tasked with overseeing the distribution of the bread and ensuring that the animals received their designated portions—though, as always, the portions for the workers remained pitifully small.

Victor stopped in front of Grunt, his chest heaving with anger. "Where’s the bread you promised?" he demanded, his voice loud enough to turn a few heads. "You said things would change after the election. You said we’d get more."

Grunt looked down at Victor, his small, beady eyes Guzzleing with amusement. He didn’t even bother to hide the smirk that crept across his face. "All in good time," he said dismissively, waving a hoof as if brushing off Victor’s concerns. "You’ll get what you deserve soon enough."

The casual tone in Grunt’s voice made Victor’s blood boil. "What we deserve?" he repeated, his voice trembling with frustration. "We’ve worked harder than ever, and all we get are crumbs! Where’s the bread you promised?"

But Grunt wasn’t listening. He simply turned his back on Victor, walking away with a lazy flick of his tail, leaving the cockroach standing there, fists clenched and heart pounding with rage. The blatant disregard, the smirking dismissal—it was more than Victor could bear.

The other cockroaches had seen the exchange, and as Grunt walked away, a wave of quiet murmurs spread through the group. They had believed the pigs when they said the election would bring change, that it would finally give them a bigger share of the bread. But now, as the day dragged on and nothing changed, they began to feel the sharp sting of betrayal.

"They lied to us," one of the older cockroaches said, his voice heavy with bitterness. "They never meant to give us more."

"It’s always the same," another added, shaking her head in disbelief. "They make promises, and we believe them. But nothing ever changes."

Ash stood near the group, listening to their words, her own heart heavy with frustration. She had seen this coming—had warned Victor that the pigs couldn't be trusted—but that didn't make the betrayal any easier to swallow. The system was designed to keep the animals working, to keep them hoping for something better, even when there was no real intention of delivering on those hopes.

Victor returned to the group, his face red with anger, but there was a look of defeat in his eyes. He had tried to confront the pigs, tried to demand the bread they had been promised, but it was clear now that the pigs had no intention of keeping their word.

"They don't care," Victor said quietly, his voice thick with frustration. "They never did."

The cockroaches murmured in agreement, their once-hopeful voices now filled with bitterness and doubt. The promises of the election had been nothing more than a way to keep them working, to stop them from questioning the system long enough for the pigs to maintain their control.

And as the sun dipped lower in the sky, casting long shadows over the farm, the mood among the workers shifted from hope to something darker. The pigs had lied to them. The election had been a farce. And now, as they stood with only crumbs in their hands, the first seeds of rebellion began to take root.

The farm had fallen into a heavy silence, broken only by the soft murmurs of the animals as they went about their tasks. But beneath that silence, frustration simmered. The hope that had filled the farm on election day was now gone, replaced with something darker, something more dangerous. As the animals returned to their usual routines, the promises of change rang hollow in their ears, and the reality of their situation began to sink in.

For the cockroaches, the sense of betrayal was sharp and bitter. They had worked harder than ever, believing that their efforts would finally be rewarded, that the pigs would distribute the bread more fairly as they had promised. But the crumbs they had received were the same as before—small, barely enough to survive on, while the pigs continued to hoard the bulk of the bread for themselves.

As Ash and Victor worked side by side, the mood among the cockroaches had shifted from disappointment to a growing resentment. It wasn't just the cockroaches who felt it, either. Across the farm, other animals were beginning to murmur quietly among themselves, their frustrations rising as the weight of their labor pressed down on them without reward.

The cows, once proud and strong, stood slumped in the pasture, their bodies thin and exhausted. Their udders, once full and heavy, had been milked dry, hanging like oblate sacks against their hunger swollen bellies. They gave everything they had, day after day, only to watch the pigs take the milk for themselves. The cows murmured softly to one another, their voices filled with weariness and bitterness.

"We give and give," one cow said, her voice low and tired. "And what do we get? Nothing but some grass they leave for us."

"They promised things would change," another cow replied, shaking her head. "But here we are, still empty."

In the chicken coops, the mood was no better. The hens clucked softly among themselves, their eyes filled with resentment as they thought about the eggs they produced every day, only for the pigs to take them all. The eggs, the result of their hard work, were carted away without a second thought, leaving the hens with nothing but straw and empty nests.

"They take every egg," one chicken muttered, her feathers ruffling with frustration. "And we get nothing in return."

"They said things would be different after the election," another hen added, her tone bitter. "But they just keep taking, and we keep laying. Nothing changes."

The farm was beginning to seethe with quiet anger. The promises of the pigs had turned to ash in the animals' mouths, and the reality of their situation had become impossible to ignore.

As Ash and Victor worked, their hands moving slowly through the motions of kneading the dough, Ash finally spoke, her voice heavy with the weight of the truth she had known all along.

"I told you, Victor," she said quietly, her eyes fixed on the bread in front of her. "They'll never share the bread. They just needed our votes. That's all this was—a way to keep us working, to stop us from pushing back."

Victor was silent for a moment, his eyes downcast as he worked. The hope that had filled him only a day ago had crumbled into dust, leaving behind a hollow feeling that he couldn't shake. He had believed in the pigs, had trusted that they would finally make things right. But now, standing with only crumbs in his hands and the weight of his disappointment hanging over him, he could no longer deny the truth.

"You're right," Victor said softly, his voice breaking the silence between them. "It's always the same. We work, they take, and we're left with nothing. I should've seen it before."

Ash glanced at him, her face softening. She had always known that the pigs wouldn't keep their promises, but seeing Victor's faith shatter before her eyes was harder than she expected. He had always been the hopeful one, always trying to find a reason to believe that things would get better. And now, that hope was gone, replaced with the same bitterness and resentment that was growing in all of them.

"It's not your fault, Victor," Ash said, her voice gentle. "They're good at this—making us believe that things will change, that we just need to work a little harder, wait a little longer. But they'll never give us more. Not unless we make them."

Victor looked up at her, his eyes filled with a new kind of resolve. "So what do we do?" he asked quietly. "Just keep working for crumbs? Or do we finally do something about it?"

The words hung in the air between them, heavy with meaning. Around them, the other cockroaches murmured softly, their voices carrying the same undercurrent of anger and frustration. They had believed in the pigs, had trusted that the election would bring real change, but now they saw the truth. The pigs had never intended to share the bread. The system had always been rigged, and they were nothing more than cogs in the machine.

As the day wore on, the sense of betrayal deepened, and the quiet resentment that had been building for so long now threatened to turn into something more dangerous. The animals had been patient, they had been hopeful, but that hope had been turned against them. And now, as they stood with empty stomachs and empty hands, the anger that had once been a flicker was growing into a flame.

In the heart of the farm, far from the workers' murmurs of discontent, the pigs reveled in their luxury. Sludge, Guzzle, and the others lounged in the thick mud near their grand barn, their bloated bodies covered in flies that buzzed lazily around them, drawn to the filth that clung to their skin. Each step they took sent splatters of dung across the ground, adding to the mess they left in their wake, but none of them seemed to care. The pigs were too lost in their indulgence, croaking with satisfaction as they slurped away the fresh milk of the cows and feasted on the eggs they had taken from the chickens.

Their mouths were full, chewing and snorting loudly as they devoured large quantities of bread, crumbs spilling from their snouts and disappearing into the mud below. The sweet, yeasty scent of the bread mixed with the sour stench of their unwashed bodies, a nauseating stench that seemed to suit the pigs just fine.

Beneath the warm rays of the sun, they lay lazily, their bellies full and their minds at ease. Farts erupted from their bloated bodies, but the pigs only laughed, praising each other for the "hard work" they had done in keeping the farm running so efficiently. Sludge, his face smeared with egg yolk and milk dribbling down his chin, looked at his fellow pigs with a satisfied grunt.

"We've earned this," he croaked, splashing mud with a lazy hoof. "Running a farm is hard work, after all. Let the others toil away—we've done our part."

Guzzle nodded in agreement, his body half-submerged in the muck, his snout smeared with crumbs. "Exactly," he wheezed, pausing only to shove another handful of bread into his mouth. "The farm wouldn't run without us."

And so they lay, dirty, stinking, and bloated, lost in the pleasures of their gluttony, while the other animals they ruled over worked in hunger and silence.

The atmosphere in the bread mill had grown tense. The murmurs of anger and frustration that had started quietly were now becoming more vocal, as the cockroaches whispered to one another about the betrayal of the pigs and the broken promises of the election. The sense of injustice hung thick in the air, and it wasn't long before the pigs took notice.

From their perch in the grand barn, they could hear the growing unrest among the workers, and it wasn't something they were willing to tolerate. They had allowed the animals just enough hope to keep them working, but now, as that hope turned to anger, the pigs knew they needed to restore order quickly. They didn't need more words or speeches—they needed force.

That's when the dogs arrived.

Rex and Buster, the pigs' loyal enforcers, stalked into the bread mill with their heads held high, their muscular bodies casting long shadows over the cockroaches as they worked. Their

sharp eyes scanned the room, taking in the hushed conversations and the uneasy glances exchanged between the workers. The dogs knew their presence was enough to instill fear, but today, they would do more than just watch. Today, they would remind the cockroaches who truly held the power on the farm.

With a deep, menacing growl, Rex barked an order, his voice loud and commanding. "Back to work! No more talking about bread!" His eyes flashed with authority, and the sound of his bark echoed through the mill, causing the cockroaches to stiffen and lower their heads in submission.

The conversations that had once buzzed quietly between the workers fell silent in an instant. The cockroaches, though burning with resentment, knew better than to disobey. They had seen what happened to those who resisted—the swift punishment delivered by the dogs, the harsh consequences of stepping out of line. Fear, after all, was the pigs' most powerful tool, and Rex and Buster were more than willing to wield it.

Buster paced between the ovens, his sharp teeth bared in a snarl, his presence alone enough to send a shiver through the crowd. The cockroaches didn't dare make eye contact, their hands moving quickly as they kneaded the dough, hoping to avoid drawing attention to themselves. But the tension in the room was palpable, the fear mingling with the growing anger, creating an atmosphere thick with unspoken defiance.

"You heard him!" Rex barked again, his voice dripping with menace. "Keep your mouths shut and do your job. The pigs don't want to hear any more talk about bread!"

The cockroaches complied, their hands working mechanically, but the seed of rebellion had already been planted. Though they obeyed the dogs, their hearts were no longer filled with submission. Beneath the fear, beneath the heavy presence of Rex and Buster, the cockroaches' anger continued to grow, feeding on the injustice they had suffered.

Ash kept her head down, her hands moving swiftly as she worked, but her mind was racing. She had seen this kind of enforcement before—how the dogs would come in, barking orders and asserting their authority, silencing the animals with fear. But this time felt different. This time, the fear wasn't enough to erase the betrayal that hung over them like a storm cloud.

Beside her, Victor worked in silence, his face tight with anger. He hadn't spoken a word since Rex and Buster had arrived, but Ash could see the tension in his body, the way his hands gripped the dough a little too hard, his knuckles white with frustration. The hope he had carried before the election had been shattered, and now, in the presence of the dogs, all that remained was a quiet, burning rage.

The dogs continued to patrol the mill, their eyes scanning the workers, searching for any sign of disobedience. But the cockroaches did what they were told, their hands moving faster, their eyes downcast. The pigs might have sent their enforcers to restore order, but the anger in the air was thick, and no amount of barking could erase what the cockroaches now knew: the pigs would never share the bread.

And though they worked in silence, their minds were no longer submissive. The seeds of rebellion had been planted, and no amount of intimidation from the dogs could stop them from growing.

Night had fallen over the farm, and the usually bustling yard was now still and quiet. The animals had retired to their corners, exhausted from another long day of work, but for a small group of cockroaches, the day wasn't over. Deep in the shadows of the bread mill, hidden from the watchful eyes of the pigs and their dogs, Ash, Victor, and a few other cockroaches gathered in secret.

The atmosphere was tense, their voices barely above a whisper as they crouched together in the dim light. Every creak of the barn, every distant sound made them pause, hearts pounding in their chests as they feared being overheard. The risk of what they were doing was immense—if the pigs or the dogs caught them, the punishment would be swift and brutal. But the time for fear had passed. Now, all that remained was a simmering anger and the knowledge that something had to change.

Ash glanced around the group, her eyes hard but determined. There was Victor, of course, still shaken from the betrayal of the pigs' broken promises, his face tight with anger. Beside him sat Bran, one of the older cockroaches, his usually stoic expression now clouded with frustration. Two more cockroaches, Lila and Shade, leaned in close, their eyes filled with uncertainty but a growing resolve.

For a moment, no one spoke. The weight of what they were about to discuss hung heavy in the air, each of them feeling the enormity of the decision before them. Finally, it was Ash who broke the silence, her voice barely audible as she spoke.

"We can't keep working for crumbs," she whispered, her eyes moving from one face to the next. "The pigs have lied to us again and again. They've promised us more, and we've given them everything, but they take it all for themselves. We can't keep doing this."

The others nodded silently, their faces grim. They knew the truth of her words. They had all experienced the same betrayal, the same crushing disappointment when the pigs had refused to deliver on their promises after the election. They had hoped for change, and instead, they had been given nothing but crumbs.

"So what do we do?" Bran asked, his voice low and steady. "The pigs control everything. And the dogs… they won't let us rise up without a fight."

Victor leaned forward, his face tight with anger. "We fight back," he said, his voice firm. "We can't keep living like this—working ourselves to death while they take everything. It's time we make them listen."

A murmur of agreement rippled through the group, but the tension remained. The idea of rebellion was dangerous, and they all knew the risks. The pigs had ruled the farm for so long, with the dogs enforcing their every command, that the thought of standing up to them seemed almost impossible. But the alternative—continuing to work for nothing, to live in hunger and desperation—was no longer acceptable.

"But how?" Shade asked, his voice filled with uncertainty. "How do we fight back? The pigs have the dogs on their side. We don't stand a chance against them."

Ash's eyes narrowed as she considered his question. She had been thinking about this for days now, ever since the pigs had made it clear that nothing would change. The pigs relied on

fear to control them, but if the animals stood together, if they refused to be afraid, perhaps they could break the system that had kept them in chains for so long.

"We fight by refusing to play their game," Ash said quietly, her voice filled with determination. "We stop working for them. If we don't make the bread, they have nothing. The pigs depend on us to keep the farm running. Without our labor, they lose their power."

The group fell into a tense silence, the enormity of what Ash was suggesting sinking in. A work stoppage—refusing to make the bread—was a bold and dangerous move. It would mean defying the pigs openly, challenging their authority in a way that no one had ever done before. And the dogs would not hesitate to punish those who resisted.

"They'll come after us," Lila whispered, her voice shaking slightly. "If we stop working, the dogs will make us pay."

Ash nodded, acknowledging the fear that lingered in the group. "They might," she said softly. "But they can't punish all of us. If we stand together—if the cockroaches, the cows, the chickens, everyone—refuse to work, the pigs will have no choice but to listen. They need us more than we need them."

There was a long pause as the group considered her words. Ash could see the fear in their eyes, but beneath that fear, she also saw something else—a flicker of hope, of resolve. They had lived under the pigs' control for so long, but now, for the first time, the possibility of rebellion was taking shape before them.

Victor nodded slowly, his face set with determination. "I'm with you, Ash," he said quietly. "We can't keep living like this. It's time to fight back."

One by one, the others nodded in agreement, their voices hushed but resolute. The rebellion, small and fragile as it was, had begun to take shape. They were still afraid—of the pigs, of the dogs, of what might happen if they were caught—but the anger that had built up inside them was stronger than their fear. The time for waiting was over.

"We'll need a plan," Ash whispered, leaning in closer as the group began to discuss the details of their resistance. The night was still and quiet around them, but in the shadows of the bread mill, a revolution was beginning.

In the dim light of the grand barn, Sludge stood before a large mirror, adjusting a fine top hat atop his head. His snout twitched with satisfaction as he admired the golden nose glasses perched perfectly on his face, the reflection of his velvet tailcoat gleaming in the light. He turned this way and that, admiring every angle, his chest puffed out with pride.

"Ah, what a figure of authority," Sludge muttered to himself, smiling smugly. "Truly, the finest leader this farm has ever known."

Behind him, the other pigs clapped their hooves and snorted in approval. "Brilliant, Sludge," Guzzle said, his eyes gleaming with admiration. "No one runs this farm like you do."

"The epitome of elegance and power," Muckley added, bowing slightly. "A true leader."

Sludge smiled even wider, basking in the praise. "Yes," he said softly, straightening his top hat, "I am." The other pigs also dressed up in luxurious clothing.

The Bread Revolt

The tension on the farm was no longer just a whisper. It was a brewing storm, gathering strength beneath the surface, though the pigs remained blissfully unaware. The cockroaches, once cowed into submission, now carried a quiet defiance, their eyes exchanging furtive glances as they moved through their daily tasks. The sense of betrayal had grown into something larger, more powerful—a force that could no longer be contained by fear alone.

Ash and Victor had continued their work in the shadows, meeting with small groups of animals under the cover of darkness. The secret meetings had spread beyond the cockroaches now, reaching the sheep, the chickens, and even some of the cows, their resentment toward the pigs quietly smoldering. Each night, in hushed tones and careful whispers, the animals discussed what had once seemed impossible: rebellion.

The pigs, in their arrogance, believed they had nothing to fear. Sludge, dressed in his fine top hat and tailcoat, continued to strut about the farm, convinced that the election had quelled any unrest. He believed the promise of change, hollow as it had been, was enough to keep the animals in line. The dogs patrolled the yard with their usual menace, ensuring that any dissent was swiftly silenced. To the pigs, the farm was running as smoothly as ever, their control over the bread and the workers as strong as it had always been.

But they didn’t see what was happening in the shadows.

Ash and Victor moved cautiously, rallying more animals to their cause with each passing day. The meetings were small, secretive, held in forgotten corners of the barns and hidden places behind the bread mill. They spoke of their hunger, their labor, and the pigs' betrayal. And slowly, the animals began to realize that they weren’t alone—that their anger was shared, that their desire for change was not just a distant dream but something they could fight for.

"They think they’ve won," Ash whispered one evening, her voice low but filled with resolve as she spoke to a small group of cockroaches huddled in the barn. "They think we’ll just keep working for crumbs. But we have the power. We make the bread, and without us, they have nothing."

Victor nodded, his voice carrying the same quiet determination. "The pigs believe their control is unshakable because of the dogs, because of the fear they’ve planted in us. But if we stand together, they can’t stop us. We stop working, and they lose everything."

The animals around them, once filled with fear, now looked at Ash and Victor with something closer to hope. The storm was growing, and with it, the seeds of rebellion were beginning to take root in every corner of the farm.

The morning sun rose over the farm, but today was different. The usual sounds of the bread mill—the hum of ovens, the rhythmic kneading of dough, the steady shuffle of the cockroaches at work—were absent. Instead, the mill stood eerily silent, the air thick with

tension. The cockroaches had gathered in front of the mill, standing shoulder to shoulder, their hands still, their expressions set in quiet defiance. Today, for the first time, they refused to work.

The pigs noticed immediately. From their lofty positions near the barn, they could see that the bread was not being made. The ovens were cold, and the usual morning hustle had ground to a halt. Sludge, with his top hat perched on his head and his usual smug expression replaced with a scowl, stormed toward the mill, his heavy hooves pounding the ground. Behind him, Guzzle and the other pigs followed, their faces contorted with anger.

"What's going on here?" Sludge barked, his eyes narrowing as he approached the silent crowd of cockroaches. "Why aren't you working?"

The cockroaches said nothing at first, standing firm in their silent protest. The tension in the air was palpable, and even the pigs could sense that something was brewing—something they hadn't anticipated.

Sludge's face turned a deep shade of red, his patience wearing thin. "Get back to work!" he shouted, his voice cracking with fury. "You'll get your crumbs when you've earned them!"

But the cockroaches didn't move. They stood together, their eyes steady, their resolve unbroken. The strike had begun, and for the first time in as long as they could remember, they weren't bending to the pigs' will.

Furious, Sludge turned to the dogs. "Rex! Buster! Get them back to work!" he snarled, his voice trembling with barely contained rage.

The dogs advanced quickly, their large bodies pushing through the crowd of pigs as they approached the cockroaches with low growls rumbling in their throats. Rex's sharp eyes scanned the faces of the cockroaches, his teeth bared as he barked orders.

"Back to work!" Rex growled, his voice filled with menace. "Or else you'll regret it."

The cockroaches remained unmoved, standing firm in their silent defiance. The tension between the two sides grew heavier with each passing second. The pigs watched from a distance, their faces twisted with impatience and anger. They had never seen such resistance before.

It was Ash who finally stepped forward, her heart pounding in her chest but her face calm and resolute. She knew this moment was dangerous—one wrong word, one wrong move, and the dogs would be on them. But the time for fear was over.

"We're not working," Ash said, her voice strong and clear, despite the knot of tension in her throat. "Not until we get our share of the bread."

Rex growled louder, his eyes narrowing as he advanced on her. "You'll work, or we'll make sure you never see a crumb again!"

But Ash didn’t back down. She stood tall, her eyes locked on Rex. "We’re done with crumbs," she said, her voice steady. "We work, we make the bread, and we deserve more than what you’ve given us. We won’t go back to work until we get what we deserve."

A murmur rippled through the crowd of cockroaches behind her, their voices filled with quiet support. They had been silent for so long, afraid to speak out, but now, with Ash leading them, they found their courage.

The dogs and the cockroaches stood in a tense standoff, neither side willing to back down. The pigs watched from the sidelines, their faces contorted with fury. They had always believed that their control was absolute—that fear would keep the animals in line. But now, for the first time, that control was slipping.

The first strike had begun, and there would be no turning back.

The tension in the air snapped like a taut rope, and in an instant, the dogs surged forward. Rex and Buster, driven by the pigs’ fury, lunged at the cockroaches with terrifying force. Their snarls filled the air, their sharp teeth flashing as they descended upon the workers who had dared to defy the pigs’ rule.

The scene erupted into chaos. The cockroaches scattered, trying to avoid the dogs’ vicious attacks, but there was nowhere to run. The bread mill, usually filled with the steady rhythm of work, had become a battlefield. Ash and Victor, along with the others, stood their ground as best they could, but the dogs were relentless, their massive bodies pushing through the crowd, snapping and biting.

Rex lunged at a group of cockroaches, knocking them to the ground with a powerful swipe of his paw. His jaws clamped down, narrowly missing Ash as she rolled away, her heart racing. Nearby, Buster tore into the ranks, his teeth bared as he drove the cockroaches back toward the walls of the mill, cornering them like trapped prey.

The sounds of the struggle—snarls, shouts, the heavy thud of bodies hitting the ground—filled the air. Blood stained the dirt as some of the larger animals tried to intervene. A few brave cows, their bodies still weakened from overmilking, attempted to step in to shield the cockroaches. But the dogs were too strong. Rex and Buster turned on them viciously, their teeth sinking into the cows' legs, leaving deep wounds in their soft flesh. The cows bellowed in pain, stumbling back, their udders hanging oblate and empty as they tried to retreat.

In another corner, a group of chickens rushed forward, squawking loudly in a desperate attempt to peck at the dogs and distract them. But they, too, were no match for the dogs’ strength. Buster lashed out, biting at the chickens’ wings and feathers, sending them scrambling in terror, some leaving trails of blood in their wake.

Even the sheep, normally silent and submissive, had tried to intervene, but they paid a heavy price. Several of them stood in shock, their thin, pruned bodies shaking with fear as they nursed fresh wounds where the dogs had bitten them. The scene was carnage, and the air smelled of blood and dirt.

Through the chaos, Victor fought alongside Ash, refusing to back down despite the danger. But in the middle of the struggle, Victor was hit hard by Rex, the massive dog knocking him

to the ground. Victor cried out in pain as Rex's tooth tore into his arm, leaving a deep, jagged wound. Blood spilled from the injury, staining the ground as Victor struggled to push the dog off.

"Victor!" Ash shouted, rushing to his side. She grabbed a nearby stick and swung it at Rex, her heart pounding with fear and anger. The blow startled the dog just enough for Victor to scramble away, clutching his bleeding arm as he tried to stand.

"I'm fine," Victor gasped, his face pale with pain but filled with determination. "We can't give in, Ash. Not now."

Despite the chaos, despite the blood and injuries, the cockroaches refused to yield. They stood their ground, even as the dogs continued their attack. The rebellion had begun, and the animals knew there was no turning back. Their anger had turned to resolve, and even as Rex and Buster wreaked havoc, the cockroaches remained defiant. They had started something far greater than a mere protest. This was a battle for their survival, for their dignity, and they weren't going to stop until the pigs were forced to reckon with their power.

The farm was no longer the well-oiled machine it once had been. The quiet rebellion of the cockroaches had exploded into something far more dangerous. As word of the strike and the violent attack by the dogs spread through the fields and barns, the other animals began to stir. The sheep, chickens, goats, and even the cows—all of whom had suffered under the pigs' oppressive rule—started to question their loyalty to a system that had never cared for them.

The animals had always been told that hard work would lead to prosperity, that the pigs were protecting their interests, keeping the farm running smoothly. But now, as they watched their fellow workers rise up, fighting for more than just crumbs, they began to realize the truth: the pigs needed them, not the other way around.

In the middle of the chaos, Ash stood tall, her voice rising above the noise of the mill. Blood still stained the ground from the earlier skirmish, and the injured animals nursed their wounds in the corners, but there was no turning back now. The rebellion had ignited something in all of them, and Ash knew this was their moment.

"This is our farm!" she shouted, her voice filled with defiance and strength. "We make the bread! The pigs can't live without us!"

Her words rang through the crowd, carrying with them a wave of energy that surged through the animals. The sheep, once timid and fearful, now raised their heads, their eyes filled with a new kind of determination. The chickens clucked among themselves, nodding as they whispered about the endless eggs taken from them without a second thought. Even the goats, who had always been kept in line by the pigs' promises, now saw through the lies they had been told for so long.

The animals gathered around Ash, their voices rising in unity. "The pigs can't live without us!" they echoed, their shouts growing louder as more and more of them joined the rebellion. The once quiet farm had transformed into a storm of noise and defiance, a rebellion that was no longer just about bread, but about power—about who truly ran the farm.

Beside Ash, Victor stood, still nursing the wound on his arm but refusing to back down. "We've been working for nothing," he called out, his voice filled with both pain and resolve. "We've given everything, and they've taken it all. It's time we take it back!"

The animals cheered, their voices rising together in a wave of defiance. They knew the pigs would retaliate—that the dogs would return, and the pigs would not let this rebellion stand without a fight. But the anger that had built up over years of exploitation had finally found its outlet, and the animals were ready.

The farm had been theirs all along, though the pigs had made them believe otherwise. And now, standing together, they knew they had the power to change things. The pigs could not survive without their labor, without the bread they produced, the eggs they laid, the milk they gave.

The storm that had been brewing for so long had finally arrived, and the pigs' control over the farm was crumbling before their eyes.

The grand barn, usually a place of leisure and indulgence for the pigs, was now filled with tension. Sludge, Guzzle, and the other pigs huddled together in a state of panic, their once-smug faces now twisted with worry. The rebellion had spread faster than they had anticipated, and for the first time, their control over the farm was slipping through their hooves. The cockroaches had started it, but now even the sheep, the chickens, and the goats were beginning to question the system that had kept them in line for so long. The situation was spiraling out of control.

"This is madness!" Sludge bellowed, pacing back and forth across the barn floor. His top hat sat crooked on his head, his snout twitching with anxiety. "If they stop working, we're done for! No bread, no milk, no eggs… we won't last a week!"

Guzzle stood nearby, equally shaken. His usual sharp eyes were clouded with fear as he glanced nervously out the window, watching the gathering storm of rebellious animals. "We've let this go too far," he muttered, wringing his hooves. "We should have crushed this before it started."

Sludge slammed his hoof down in frustration. "We still can! We have the dogs. They'll do what they always do—keep the animals in line. We just need to hit them harder."

He turned to the dogs, who stood by the door, awaiting orders. "Double the patrols," Sludge barked, his voice filled with desperation. "Don't let them gather in groups. And if they resist…"

Guzzle swallowed hard but nodded grimly. "Use harsher methods. Whatever it takes to break their spirits."

The dogs growled in approval, eager to carry out the pigs' orders. The pigs had always relied on brute force to maintain control, and now they were prepared to use that force in full. Fear was their weapon, and they were ready to wield it with more brutality than ever before.

As Sludge finished giving orders, he glanced toward the back of the barn, where Bray, the donkey, stood in his usual quiet demeanor. Bray had been watching the scene unfold, his

deep eyes expressionless as the pigs panicked. He had seen this kind of unrest before. He knew that rebellions could flare up, but he also knew that the system was designed to keep the animals trapped. As long as the pigs remained in control of the bread, the farm would continue to run, and Bray—as the keeper of the loans and the bread debts—would continue to benefit.

Sludge approached Bray, his voice dropping to a more measured tone. "Don't worry, Bray," he said, offering a strained smile. "You'll get your bread. We just need to crush this rebellion first. Once the animals are back in line, everything will go back to normal."

Bray nodded slowly, his expression unchanged. He knew the pigs were desperate, but he also knew that they would stop at nothing to protect their power. And as long as the bread flowed back to him, it didn't matter to Bray who was in charge. The system, no matter how chaotic it seemed at the moment, always found a way to keep him fed.

"I'll be patient," Bray said quietly, his voice calm and measured. "But remember, Sludge… the bread always returns to its rightful place."

Sludge nodded quickly, his nervousness still visible. "Of course, Bray. It always does."

With the dogs ready to act and Bray silently biding his time, the pigs believed they still had a chance to crush the rebellion before it grew any larger. But as they looked out across the farm, the sight of the animals gathering in defiance made their stomachs churn with unease. The rebellion was not just a passing storm—it was the beginning of something much larger, something they could no longer fully control.

The farm was unrecognizable. What had started as a quiet strike had erupted into full-blown rebellion, spreading like wildfire through every corner of the land. The once orderly fields, bread mill, and barns were now filled with chaos as the animals rose up together, united in their defiance against the pigs. Bread production had come to a grinding halt. The ovens were cold, the dough left unmade, and the pigs, who had once basked in their luxurious way of life, now saw that life slipping through their hooves.

The animals, no longer content with whispered complaints and quiet disobedience, had taken the fight into their own hands. They refused to work, turning their backs on the mill and the fields. But this rebellion was more than just a refusal to labor—it was sabotage. The chickens had stopped laying eggs, and the cows, in a rare act of solidarity, kicked over the milk buckets and refused to be milked. The goats tore at the fences, the sheep blocked the pathways, and the cockroaches, once seen as the lowest on the farm, had become the fiercest agitators of all.

The pigs had relied on their tight control of the farm for too long. They had grown fat and lazy on the bread, eggs, and milk provided by the labor of the other animals, and now that the work had stopped, their world was crumbling. They were scrambling to regain control, but nothing was working. The animals were done with crumbs and false promises.

Ash had become the voice of the rebellion. Her courage and leadership had ignited something in the others, and now, she stood at the forefront of the uprising, leading a group of animals in a bold, direct assault on the pigs' barn. The grand barn, once a symbol of the pigs' wealth

and power, loomed before them. Its gates, tall and imposing, were meant to keep the animals out—but today, that barrier would fall.

"No more crumbs!" Ash shouted, her voice echoing through the farm as she led the charge. "No more lies!"

Behind her, the animals surged forward, their eyes blazing with anger and resolve. They had been pushed to the edge for too long, and now they were fighting back with everything they had. The sheep, the chickens, the goats, and the cockroaches moved as one, storming the barn, their hooves, claws, and wings pounding the earth as they approached. The pigs, usually arrogant and unbothered, could be seen scurrying inside, scrambling to fortify their gates.

The dogs, loyal as ever to the pigs, stood guard at the entrance, growling and barking as the animals advanced. But even they could sense that something had shifted. The animals, who had once cowered before their fangs, now faced them without fear.

Ash reached the gates first, her eyes blazing with determination. "This is our farm!" she cried, slamming her fists against the thick wooden doors. "We make the bread! We make everything! You can't keep taking while we starve!"

The crowd behind her roared in agreement, their voices a unified force that shook the very ground beneath their feet. Together, they pushed, clawed, and kicked at the gates, their strength fueled by years of frustration and hunger.

Finally, with a deafening crack, the gates gave way. The wood splintered and shattered, and the animals poured into the barn, a wave of fury and determination. Inside, the pigs were waiting—terrified, desperate, but still clinging to their illusion of control. But now, as the animals stormed in, it was clear that the balance of power had shifted.

The rebellion had reached its breaking point, and the pigs could no longer hide behind their walls, their lies, or their dogs. Justice was no longer a distant dream—it was at the doorstep, pounding for its due.

The moment the gates of the barn splintered and fell, the farm erupted into chaos. Inside, the pigs cowered, but outside, a fierce battle broke out between the dogs and the animals. The dogs, Rex and Buster, along with the rest of the pigs' loyal enforcers, lunged at the animals with vicious intent. Their growls echoed across the yard as they snapped and barked, determined to maintain the control they had always wielded. But this time, they were outnumbered. The animals, no longer fearful, had become a force to be reckoned with.

The sheep, once meek and submissive, charged the dogs with newfound courage, their thin bodies pushing against the snarling beasts. The chickens, wings flapping furiously, pecked and clawed at the dogs, while the goats used their powerful horns to ram into them, knocking them off balance. Even the cows, weakened from their labor but still standing tall, swung their heavy hooves at the dogs in an effort to protect the other animals.

Ash stood at the front, her fists clenched, her heart pounding as she led the charge. She knew the battle wouldn't be easy—the dogs were strong, trained to keep the animals in line—but today, the animals had something more powerful: desperation, anger, and the overwhelming

desire for freedom. They fought not just with their bodies, but with the weight of years of suffering behind them.

Rex lunged at Ash, his teeth bared, but she dodged, grabbing a stick from the ground and swinging it with all her strength. The blow caught Rex across the muzzle, and he snarled in pain, but before he could recover, Victor appeared beside her, panting and bloodied, but still fighting. His injured arm hung at his side, but that didn't stop him from throwing himself into the fray.

"We're not backing down!" Victor shouted, his voice raw with determination. He grabbed a nearby tool and swung it at Buster, who had just knocked a chicken to the ground. The tool connected with a heavy thud, and Buster yelped, staggering backward.

Despite his injuries, Victor fought with everything he had, his eyes filled with the same fire that had driven him to believe in the rebellion. Every swing, every step, was fueled by his desperation to end the pigs' control, to finally claim the freedom they had been denied for so long.

The battle raged on, the dogs fighting fiercely, but they were overwhelmed by the sheer number and determination of the animals. The goats rammed into them from all sides, the chickens pecked at their eyes, and the sheep, though bleeding from bites, refused to let the dogs push them back.

Through it all, Ash and Victor fought side by side, their eyes locked on the barn, where the pigs cowered behind the broken gates. This was their moment—and they weren't going to let the pigs take it from them.

"Keep fighting!" Ash shouted, her voice rising above the noise of the battle. "We're almost there! The pigs can't win if we stand together!"

And the animals, fueled by their hatred of the pigs and their desperation for a better life, fought on, their strength growing as the dogs began to falter. The rebellion had begun, and the dogs, once so powerful, were no longer enough to stop it.

The clash of battle slowly gave way to an eerie silence as the animals, battered but victorious, stood over the fallen dogs. Rex and Buster, once the fearsome enforcers of the pigs, lay exhausted on the ground, too overwhelmed by the sheer numbers and determination of the other animals to continue the fight. They had done what once seemed impossible—they had overpowered the dogs, the last line of defense between them and the pigs.

Cheers erupted from the animals, their voices rising into the air in a mixture of disbelief and joy. The cows, sheep, chickens, goats, and cockroaches all stood together, their collective strength having toppled the order that had oppressed them for so long. For the first time, they felt the power that had been denied to them, the taste of victory fresh on their tongues.

Ash stood among them, her chest heaving as she caught her breath. She looked around at the animals, at the barn where the pigs had retreated in terror. Behind the shattered gates, the pigs had scurried like rats, retreating into their grand barn and locking the doors behind them. The sight filled her with a sense of triumph. They had done it. The pigs, who had ruled for so long, were now hiding, their power crumbling before the force of the other animals' rebellion.

"We did it," Ash whispered, her voice filled with awe. She turned to Victor, who stood beside her, bruised and bloodied but alive. His arm still hung limp from the earlier fight, but a weak smile tugged at the corners of his mouth.

"We took back the farm," Ash said, louder now, her voice filled with pride. "We won, Victor. It's ours."

Victor smiled, a flicker of satisfaction in his eyes as he looked out over the animals, who were still cheering and celebrating their victory. "Yeah, Ash, we did it," he said, his voice quiet and hoarse. But even as the words left his mouth, a shadow of doubt passed over his face, a faint sense of unease creeping into his eyes.

Ash noticed the change in his expression, her brow furrowing slightly. "What is it?" she asked, her excitement dimming just a little. "We won, Victor. This is what we've been fighting for."

Victor nodded, but the uncertainty remained. "I know," he said softly, glancing toward the barn where the pigs had hidden themselves away. "But the pigs… they won't give up that easily. They'll come back. They always do."

Ash followed his gaze to the barn, her triumphant smile fading as she realized the truth in his words. The pigs were still there, still inside, still clinging to their power. They had locked themselves away, but they hadn't been defeated completely. There was still a sense of foreboding hanging over the victory, a quiet warning that the fight might not be over yet.

"For now, though," Ash said, her voice firm, trying to keep the hope alive, "we've shown them that we won't be ruled by fear anymore. They know what we're capable of now."

Victor smiled weakly, nodding in agreement. "You're right," he said, though the unease never left his eyes. "But we'll have to be ready for whatever comes next."

The animals continued to cheer, their spirits high in the wake of their victory. But as the celebration carried on, Ash and Victor stood quietly at the edge of the crowd, the weight of the uncertain future settling over them like a shadow. They had won this battle—but the war, it seemed, was not over.

The initial rush of victory had begun to fade as the animals gathered around the pigs' grand barn, their cheers now quieting into a murmur of uncertainty. They had broken down the gates, sent the dogs running, and forced the pigs into hiding, but as the adrenaline wore off, a sobering truth began to settle over the farm.

The pigs may have retreated, but the farm's systems, the very structure that kept the animals oppressed, remained firmly in place. The towering silos, where the wheat was stored under lock and key, still stood as a grim reminder of who truly controlled the bread. The fields, tilled and sown under the pigs' strict orders, stretched out across the horizon, their golden waves swaying in the breeze. It was a stark contrast to the victory they had just tasted.

The animals stood in uneasy silence, their triumph now tinged with doubt. They had stormed the barn, but the bread—the thing they had fought so hard for—was still out of reach. The

pigs still held the keys to the silos, still had the systems of the farm working in their favor. The bread, the very symbol of their power, was still theirs.

Ash stood at the forefront of the crowd, her earlier sense of triumph replaced by a growing unease. She looked up at the barn, where the pigs were barricaded inside, and felt the weight of the realization pressing down on her.

"We might have won today," Ash murmured, her voice barely above a whisper, but it carried through the gathered animals like a ripple. "But what about tomorrow?"

Victor stood beside her, still nursing his wounds from the earlier battle, his brow furrowed as he watched the others. "What do you mean?" he asked softly, though a part of him already understood the gravity of her words.

Ash sighed, her eyes drifting toward the distant silos where the wheat—where the bread—was stored. "The bread… it's still theirs," she said, her voice heavy with the weight of the truth. "We've driven them back, but they still control the farm. The wheat, the systems, everything… it's still in their hands."

The animals, overhearing her words, shifted uncomfortably. Their victory had felt so complete in the moment, but now, faced with the hard reality of the farm's inner workings, the truth began to settle in. The pigs may have been hiding, but the system that had kept them in power was still intact.

"What do we do now?" a sheep asked, her voice trembling with uncertainty. "We stopped them, didn't we? Why doesn't it feel like enough?"

Ash clenched her fists, her mind racing. She had led the animals through this rebellion, had shown them that they didn't have to live in fear of the pigs or the dogs. But now, as she stood before the barn, she realized that simply driving the pigs away wasn't enough to dismantle the structures that had kept them all oppressed.

"We need more than just a victory over the pigs," Ash said, her voice growing steadier. "We need to change the farm itself. We need control of the bread. Without that… this will just happen all over again."

The animals listened, their faces a mixture of confusion and determination. The fight they had started wasn't over—it was only beginning. They had won a battle, but the war for true freedom, for the control of the farm's resources, was far from won.

As dusk fell over the farm, an uneasy silence settled in. The echoes of the battle still lingered in the air, but now, the only sound was the gentle rustling of the wheat fields and the distant creak of old barn doors swaying in the evening breeze. The pigs had locked themselves away in their grand barn, terrified and silent behind the thick walls. The dogs, once so fierce and loyal to the pigs, had been defeated, their growls replaced by whimpers as they nursed their wounds in the far corners of the farm.

But the animals, though victorious, stood uncertain. They had gathered near the bread mill, their bodies bruised and exhausted, their minds swirling with the weight of what had just happened—and what was yet to come. The rebellion had erupted in force, fueled by their

collective anger, but as the adrenaline of the fight wore off, a stark reality began to settle in: the system they had fought so hard against was still very much intact.

The bread silos loomed ominously in the distance, locked and full, the key to the farm's power still firmly in the pigs' possession. The wheat, golden and abundant, waved lazily in the fields, untouched, still owned by those who had hoarded it for so long. And though the pigs had been pushed back, they hadn't been defeated. They were still there, still controlling the resources that dictated the animals' lives.

Ash stood at the center of the group, her fists clenched at her sides, her eyes scanning the darkening horizon. The fight had felt monumental, a defining moment in their struggle, but now that it was over, the silence was suffocating. They had won a battle, but the system that had oppressed them for so long—the control over the bread, the endless cycles of labor—remained in place.

Beside her, Victor leaned heavily on a wooden post, his body weary but his spirit unbroken. "We've come this far," he said softly, his voice breaking the heavy quiet. "But it's not over, is it?"

Ash shook her head slowly, her eyes fixed on the distant barns where the pigs were hiding. "No," she said, her voice barely above a whisper. "It's not over. The pigs are still in control. And until we take the farm back from them—from the inside—nothing will truly change."

The animals exchanged glances, their faces filled with a mix of exhaustion and determination. The rebellion had begun, but now they faced the daunting task of rebuilding the farm in their own image, of dismantling the systems that had kept them chained to the pigs' rule for so long. The silence of the farm was heavy with the weight of what came next.

As the last light of the sun dipped below the horizon, casting long shadows across the fields, the animals stood together, staring at the future that lay before them. The fight was not over. The rebellion had sparked, but the road to freedom was just beginning.

The New Dawn

The morning after the rebellion dawned softly, casting a pale light across the farm as the animals emerged from their corners, their bodies bruised but their spirits still flickering with hope. The air was heavy with uncertainty, as if the farm itself was holding its breath, waiting to see what would come next. The pigs were still locked away in their barn, silent and defeated, but the animals knew that simply pushing them back wasn't enough. Today, they had to begin rebuilding—begin taking back what had been denied to them for so long.

The bread mill, once a symbol of their endless toil, stood still. The ovens were cold, the loaves unmade, and the silos, still holding their bounty of wheat, loomed over the animals like a challenge waiting to be faced. For the first time, the animals had a chance to decide how the bread—the source of power on the farm—would be distributed. But with that

opportunity came confusion. How could they ensure that things wouldn’t go back to the way they were?

Ash and Victor stood together near the mill, watching as the animals slowly gathered around, their eyes filled with a mix of hope and hesitation. The fight was over, but the harder task of creating something new had just begun.

"We can’t let things go back to the way they were," Victor said, breaking the silence. His voice was quiet but firm, his face still marked by the injuries from the battle. "We’ve fought too hard to end up right back where we started."

Ash nodded, her gaze fixed on the silos in the distance. "But how do we stop it?" she asked, her voice tinged with worry. "The bread… it’s what they used to control us. If we don’t find a way to share it fairly, what’s to stop someone else from doing the same?"

Victor glanced at her, understanding the weight of her words. The pigs had built their rule on controlling the bread, and now, without a clear system to replace that control, the animals could easily fall into the same trap of inequality and greed.

"We have to come together," Victor said after a long pause. "We have to make sure that no one animal has more power than the others. The bread belongs to all of us. We can’t let a few take more than they need."

But even as he spoke, the uncertainty lingered. The animals had lived under the pigs' rule for so long that the idea of true equality felt distant, even impossible. How could they ensure that the greed that had driven the pigs wouldn’t find its way into their own hearts?

Around them, the other animals began murmuring quietly, discussing what should come next. The goats, the sheep, the chickens, and the cows all exchanged worried glances, unsure of how to proceed. They had fought together, but now that the fight was over, the question of how to rebuild was heavy on everyone’s minds.

Ash turned to face the crowd, her voice rising above the quiet chatter. "We’ve taken back the farm," she said, her eyes scanning the faces of the animals who had fought so bravely. "But now we have to decide how to make it ours. The bread isn’t just for the pigs anymore—it’s for all of us. And we have to figure out how to share it, how to make sure that what we fought for doesn’t slip away."

The animals listened, their faces a mixture of hope and fear. They had won the battle, but now they were faced with the much more difficult task of creating something new. How would they divide the bread? How would they ensure that no one animal would hoard it, as the pigs had done?

The silence that followed Ash’s words was thick with uncertainty. They had won the rebellion, but the road ahead was far from clear.

The tension on the farm was palpable, the weight of the uncertain future pressing down on the animals as they gathered around the bread mill. They had won the battle, but the question of how to divide the bread, how to rebuild their lives, lingered in the air like an unanswered

prayer. It was then that a surprising sound broke the silence—a voice, familiar and dripping with false charm, calling from behind the fortified walls of the pigs' grand barn.

"Let's talk!" Sludge's voice echoed from the barn, sending a ripple of disbelief through the crowd of animals. The pigs, who had been cowering inside their luxurious shelter, were now offering to negotiate.

The barn doors creaked open just enough for Sludge to step out, dressed in his usual fine coat and top hat, though his once-smug expression had been replaced by a carefully crafted look of concern. The other pigs lingered in the shadows behind him, their eyes darting nervously as they watched the gathering animals.

"We've seen what's happened," Sludge began, his voice smooth and calculated. "And we understand that things need to change. We are willing to negotiate, to find a way to share the bread more fairly… for the good of the farm."

His words hung in the air, and the animals exchanged uncertain glances. The pigs, who had ruled through greed and deception for so long, were now offering a deal. It was a proposal that seemed too good to be true—promises of a more equal distribution of bread, of fairness and cooperation, all delivered with a rehearsed sincerity that didn't sit right with many of the animals.

Ash stood at the front of the crowd, her eyes narrowing as she watched Sludge. She had seen him make promises before, had heard his speeches filled with hollow assurances. The memory of those lies, of the empty promises of the election, still burned fresh in her mind.

"We can't trust them," Ash said quietly, her voice filled with doubt. "They've lied to us too many times. They're just trying to save themselves now that they've lost control."

But not everyone was so sure. Victor, still nursing his wounds but determined to find a solution, stepped forward, his face etched with uncertainty. "What choice do we have?" he asked, his voice low but filled with conviction. "The bread's still locked away in their silos. We need it, Ash. If we don't find a way to share it, we'll starve. Maybe… maybe this time they mean it."

The animals murmured among themselves, divided. Some, like Ash, remained wary, knowing all too well the lengths the pigs had gone to in order to maintain their power. But others, desperate for a solution, for a way forward, stomachs already gurgling, couldn't ignore the appeal of Sludge's offer.

Ash clenched her fists, her heart heavy with frustration. She had led the animals through rebellion, had shown them that they didn't have to live in fear of the pigs or the dogs. But now, faced with Sludge's calculated words, she could see the hope creeping back into the eyes of the animals, hope that maybe this time, the pigs could be trusted.

"You know what they're doing," Ash said softly, turning to Victor. "They'll promise anything to stay in control. And once we agree, it'll all go back to the way it was."

Victor shook his head, his eyes filled with doubt. "Maybe," he admitted. "But what if this is our only chance? We don't have the means to take the bread by force. Maybe a deal is the only way we can survive."

The farm was silent once more, the weight of the decision pressing down on everyone. The pigs' offer hung in the air, tempting, but dangerous. The animals had to decide—trust the pigs once again, or risk everything to claim the bread for themselves.

The air was thick with tension as the animals gathered in front of the grand barn, waiting for the outcome of the negotiations. It had been a hard-fought battle, but in the end, desperation had driven the animals to agree to talk. With the bread locked away in the silos and the farm's future uncertain, the thought of compromise, however bitter, had become too tempting to resist.

The barn doors opened once again, and Sludge stepped forward, his top hat perfectly adjusted, his face painted with the look of a benevolent leader. Behind him, the other pigs hovered, their expressions carefully neutral, while the dogs, battered from the rebellion but standing tall once more, flanked them. The dogs had been reinstated, their role as enforcers solidified once again, ensuring that the pigs' promises would be kept—on their terms.

"We've come to an agreement," Sludge announced, his voice smooth and calculated, as always. "In the interest of peace and the well-being of the farm, we have decided to increase your share of the bread."

The animals murmured quietly, a mixture of relief and suspicion spreading through the crowd. The promise of more bread was something, a small concession after everything they had fought for, but the words felt hollow. The share was still far from fair, still controlled by the pigs, and many of the animals knew it. Yet, with hunger gnawing at their bellies and the fight having taken so much out of them, it was difficult to refuse.

Ash stood near the front of the group, her jaw tight with frustration. The pigs had regained control, just as she had feared. They had given the animals a taste of what they wanted—just enough to quiet the rebellion—but it was clear that the balance of power hadn't shifted nearly as much as it needed to.

"A larger share," Sludge continued, his voice dripping with false kindness. "But remember, we must work together for the good of the farm. The bread will be distributed according to what each of us contributes."

The animals listened, many nodding along, comforted by the idea that they were receiving more than before. But Ash's eyes narrowed. It was the same old promise, the same lie wrapped in new words. The pigs were offering them crumbs compared to everything they produced, and once again, the animals were being convinced that things were improving, when in truth, they had only won a small fraction of what they deserved.

Victor, standing beside her, glanced over, his expression torn. "It's not enough," he whispered, his voice filled with quiet resignation. "But what choice do we have? At least it's better than nothing."

Ash sighed, her heart heavy with the weight of defeat. "They've played us again," she said, her voice low and filled with bitterness. "They're giving just enough to keep us quiet, but we're still at their mercy. The bread is still theirs, and the dogs are back to keep us in line."

Victor didn't respond, his face drawn in thought. He knew Ash was right, but he also knew that the animals, exhausted and broken from the rebellion, couldn't continue the fight right now. For the moment, they had to accept the pigs' terms, even if it meant that real change was still out of reach.

The farm fell into an uneasy calm as the animals accepted the new terms, their hopes tempered by the reality of their situation. The pigs, using their charm and manipulation, had managed to regain control, though it was fragile. They promised that things would improve, that the farm would run more smoothly now, but it was clear to some that nothing had really changed. The pigs were still in charge, the dogs still patrolled the fields, and the animals, though given a slightly larger share of the bread, were still bound by the system that had oppressed them for so long.

A new cycle had begun, one that looked different but felt hauntingly familiar. And as the animals returned to their work, the farm once again fell into its old rhythms, the promises of equality just out of reach, controlled by those who knew how to wield power best.

The farm had settled back into its routine, the rebellion already beginning to feel like a distant memory. The cockroaches returned to the bread mill, their hands moving rhythmically through the dough, but the energy that had once driven them to rise up now seemed to have drained away. The sheep, still thin and trembling, grazed quietly in the fields. The chickens clucked softly to themselves as they laid their eggs, and the cows, their udders swollen, lined up for milking once more.

Though the animals had won a few crumbs more, the hard truth was that nothing had truly changed. The pigs still held the keys to the silos, still decided how the bread was distributed, and though the animals had been promised a larger share, it was far from fair. The system that had kept them hungry and desperate was still in place, and the small concessions made by the pigs felt like a hollow victory. The bread still belonged to them. The power, the control, it was still locked behind the barn doors, guarded by the pigs and enforced by the dogs.

Ash watched the animals as they returned to their labor, her heart heavy with the realization of just how little had shifted. The fight had felt so monumental in the moment, the rebellion so powerful, but now, looking around, it was clear that the same system they had tried to overthrow had simply reformed around them. The pigs had given them just enough to keep the farm running smoothly again, but nothing more.

As she stood by the bread mill, her hands absentmindedly kneading the dough, Ash couldn't help but reflect on all that had happened. The uprising, the hope they had carried, the belief that they could take back the farm, that they could change their lives. But now, as she looked at the lines of animals returning to their work, she wondered if they had ever truly understood what they were fighting for.

"We thought we could change things," Ash murmured softly, her voice filled with the weight of bitter understanding. She turned to Victor, who stood beside her, still nursing the wounds

from the battle but as silent and reflective as she was. "But maybe it was never about the bread. Maybe it’s about who has the power."

Victor looked at her, his face tired but his eyes filled with the same quiet realization. "The bread was just the symbol," he said, his voice low. "It’s always been about the power. As long as the pigs control it, nothing will change."

Ash nodded, her gaze distant as she watched the farm continue its endless cycle. The rebellion had taught them something deeper than just the need for bread—it had shown them that real change couldn’t come from fighting for crumbs. It had to come from dismantling the systems of control, from taking the power away from those who had hoarded it for so long. But as the animals settled back into their old routines, Ash wondered if they would ever have the strength to rise again, to truly break free.

The farm returned to its uneasy quiet, the sounds of labor echoing through the fields as the animals worked on, knowing deep down that the system remained the same. The pigs still ruled, the bread was still unevenly distributed, and the power—the real power—remained out of reach.

The cycle, it seemed, would continue.

As the sun began to dip below the horizon, casting long shadows across the fields, the farm fell into an almost serene quiet. The bread mill hummed with the steady rhythm of work, the cows lined up for their evening milking, and the chickens scratched at the dirt. To anyone passing by, it might have seemed as though nothing had ever changed. The rebellion, the uprising, the cries for justice—all of it seemed like a fading memory as the animals returned to the routines they knew so well.

But there was something different, a quiet shift beneath the surface. Though the pigs still ruled the farm, though the bread remained in their control, the animals had learned something vital through their failed rebellion. They had come together once, rising up against their oppressors, and even though they had been forced back into their old roles, they had seen a glimpse of what was possible. They now understood that real change—true freedom—would not come from within the system, but from breaking it altogether.

Ash stood alone at the edge of the field, her eyes fixed on the distant horizon. The weight of everything that had happened, everything they had fought for, pressed heavily on her shoulders. The rebellion had failed to bring the justice they so desperately wanted, but the lessons it had taught them still lingered. They had learned that crumbs would never be enough. That as long as the pigs held the power, the farm would never truly be free.

Beside her, Victor approached quietly, his footsteps soft against the grass. His face was still bruised from the battle, but there was a quiet strength in his eyes, a determination that had not been broken by their defeat.

"Do you think it’ll ever really change?" Victor asked, his voice low and contemplative.

"Maybe next time," Ash said softly, the words carrying with them the weight of hope and the sting of doubt.

The pigs, bloated and filthy, lay sprawled in the thick mud in front of their grand barn, their snouts quivering with laughter. They had done it again—managed to keep the animals in line with nothing more than a few extra scraps of bread. It had been so easy. All it took was a hollow promise, a little more to fill their bellies, and the animals had fallen back into the endless wheel of work and obedience. "Look at them!″ Sludge croaked, pointing lazily toward the ovens and fields where the cockroaches, sheep, and chickens toiled away. "Throw these fools a bit more crumbs, and they'll be satisfied! We'll never have to lift a hoof again!" He farted loudly, his body shaking with delight, and the other pigs snorted in agreement, their laughter bubbling up in thick, muddy bursts.

They rolled over in the muck, filthy and unbothered, stuffing their mouths with bread, slurping up milk, and cracking open fresh eggs with both hands. Glint, one of the bigger pigs, squealed in sheer pleasure as dung exploded from his backside, the sensation only adding to his enjoyment. "Ah, nothing like a good day's... digestion!" he cackled, watching the animals struggle in the distance, oblivious to the system that still chained them. His eyes gleamed with satisfaction as he grabbed another hunk of bread, shoving it into his bloated snout.

As the sun dipped below the horizon, casting the farm in a soft golden glow, the pigs' laughter quieted. Their bodies, fat and sated, began to relax. The other animals might still be toiling away under the dying light, but the pigs had eaten their fill and knew the system was secure. With a final croak of amusement, they slumbered into a peaceful, satisfied sleep, their mud-covered bodies sinking deeper into the filth that seemed to cradle them. The wheel of slavery had turned again, and the pigs could rest easy, knowing tomorrow would be just the same.